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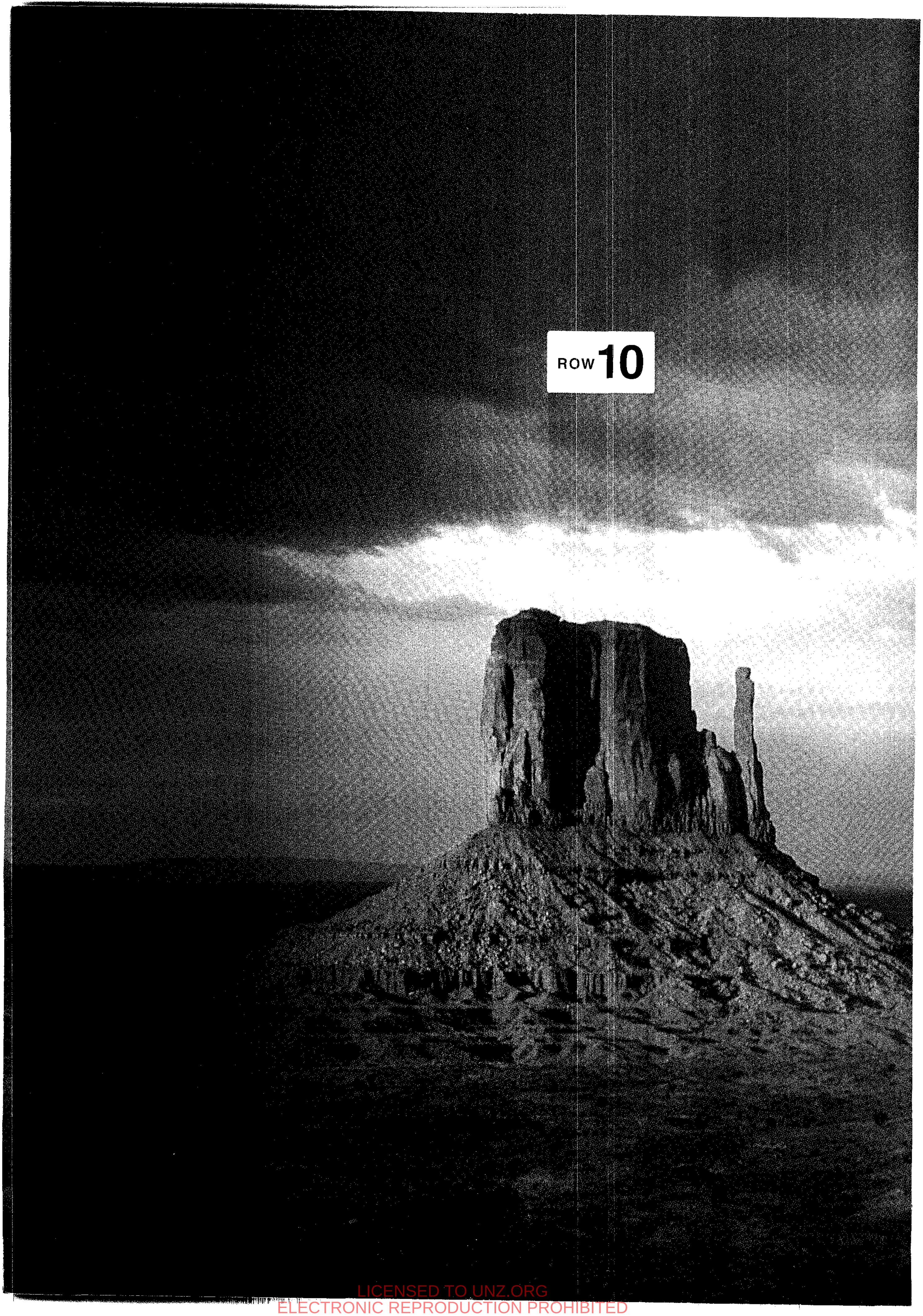
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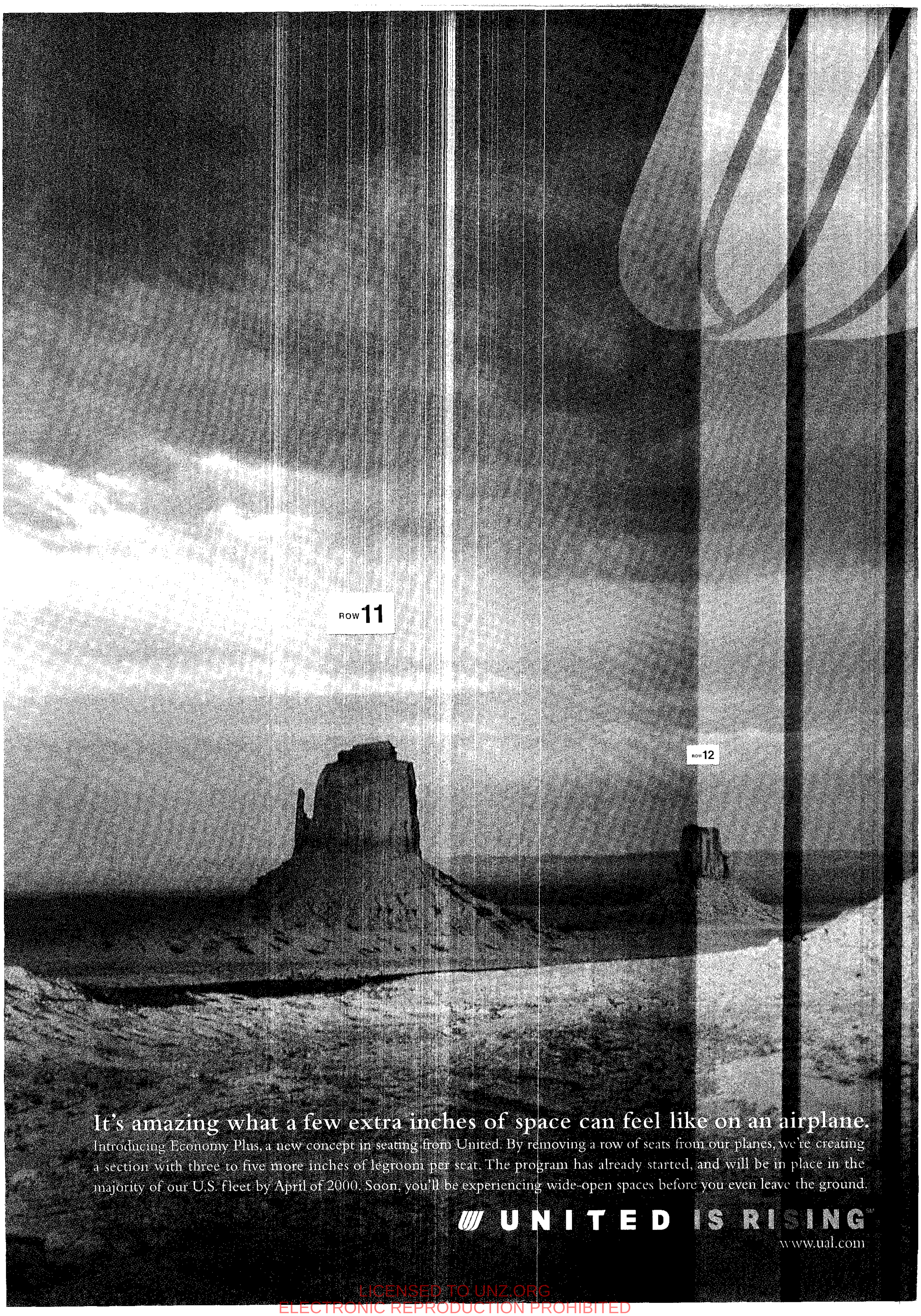

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DRAWINGS *Liza Donnelly, Victoria Roberts, Jack Ziegler, Sam Gross, Barbara Smaller, Mike Twohy, Robert Weber, Danny Shanahan, Edward Sorel, Mick Stevens, Leo Cullum, David Sipress, Roz Chast, William Hamilton, Michael Crawford, Bruce Eric Kaplan*

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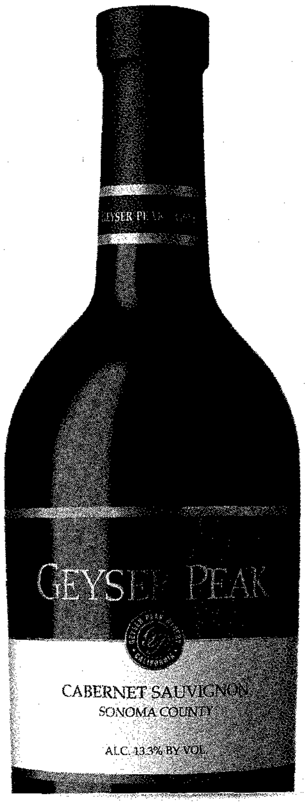
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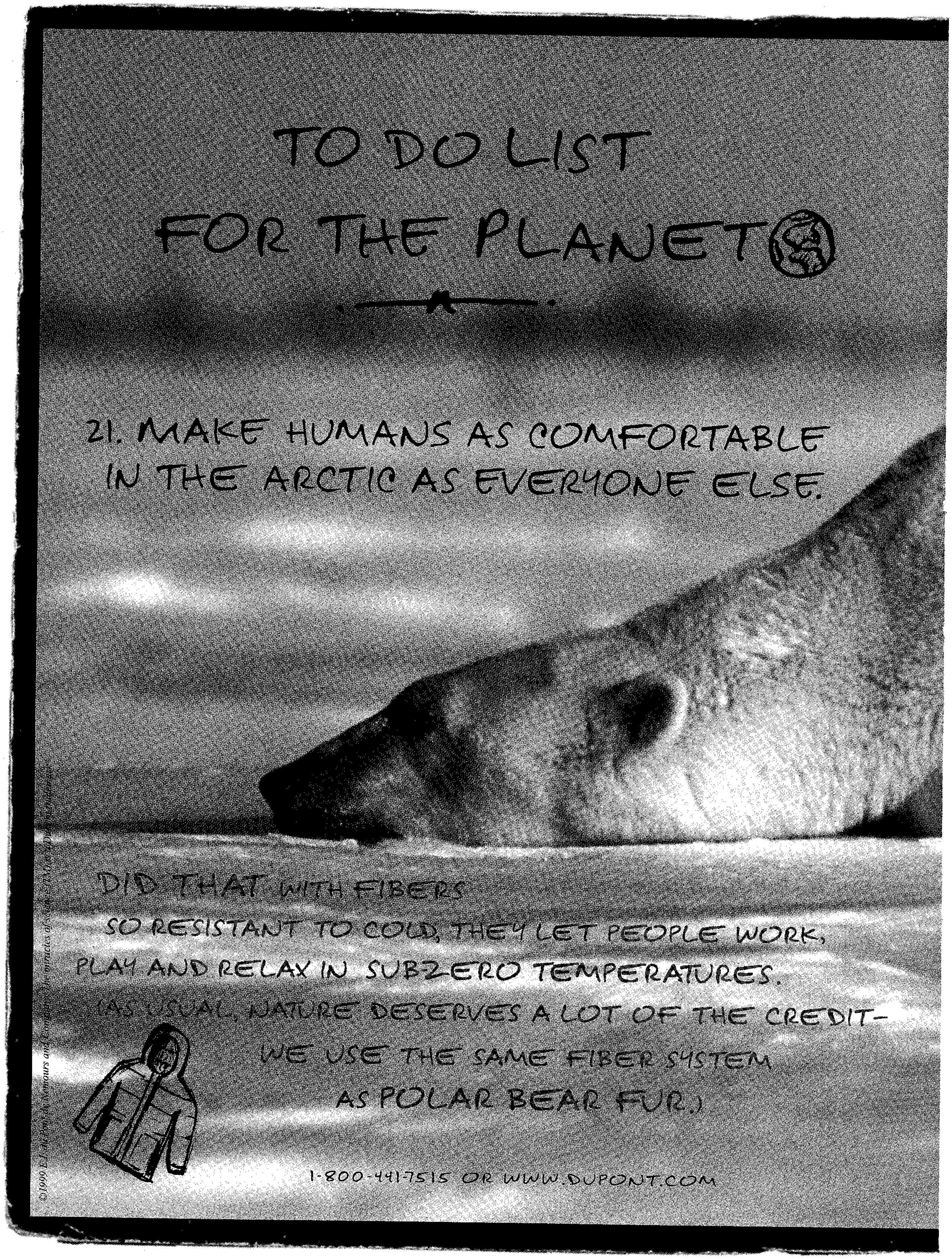

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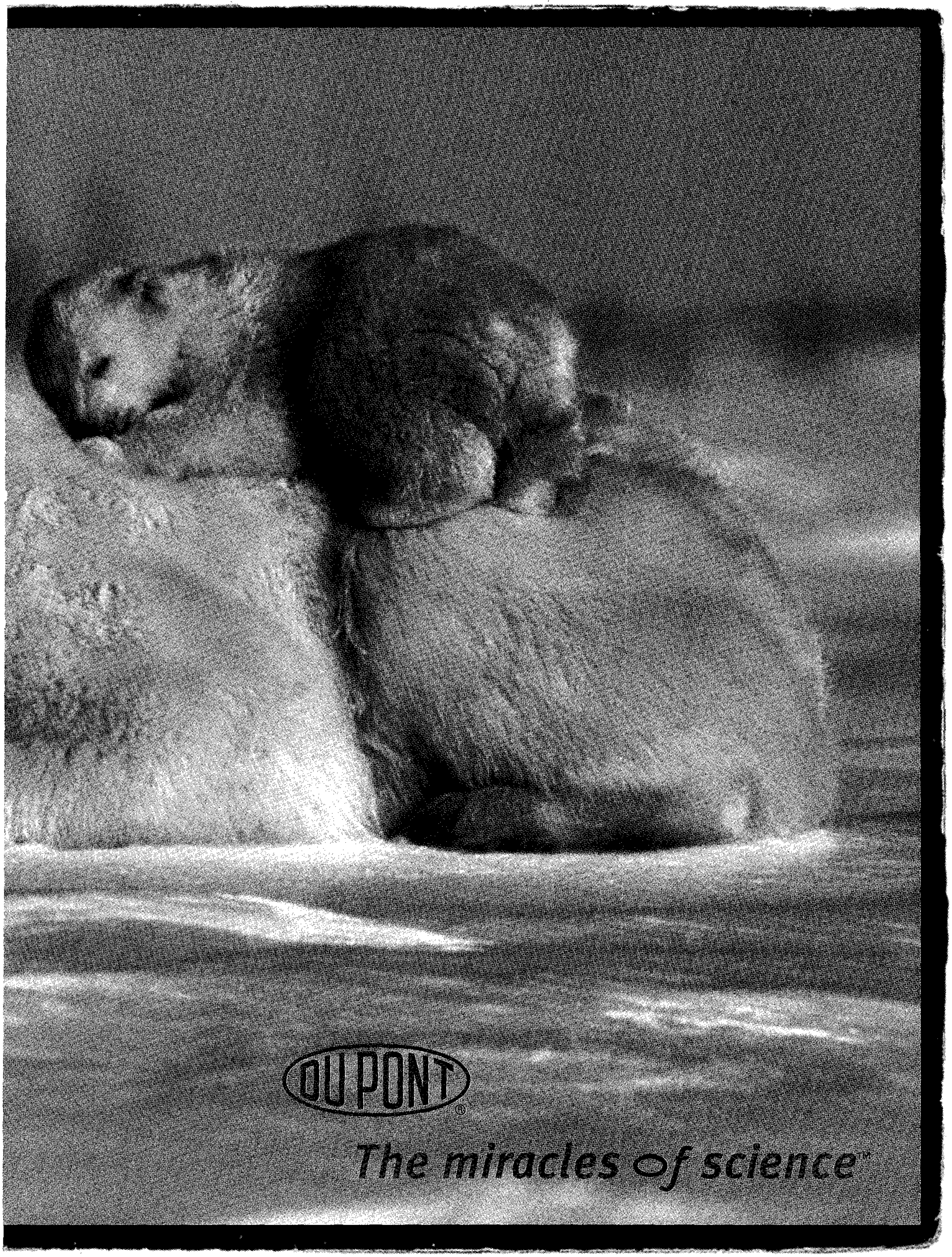

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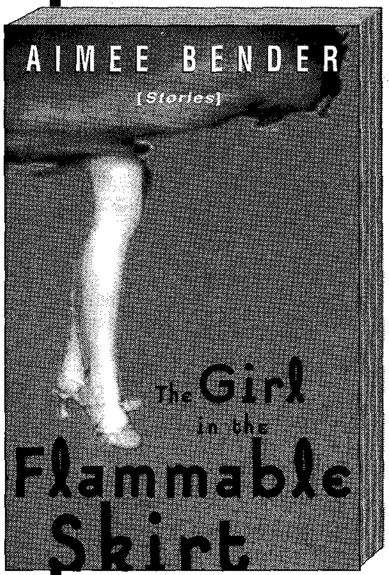

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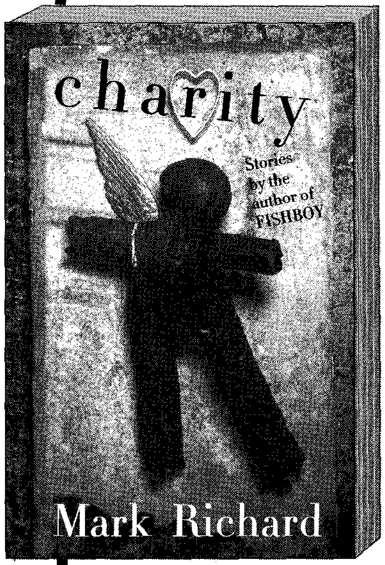

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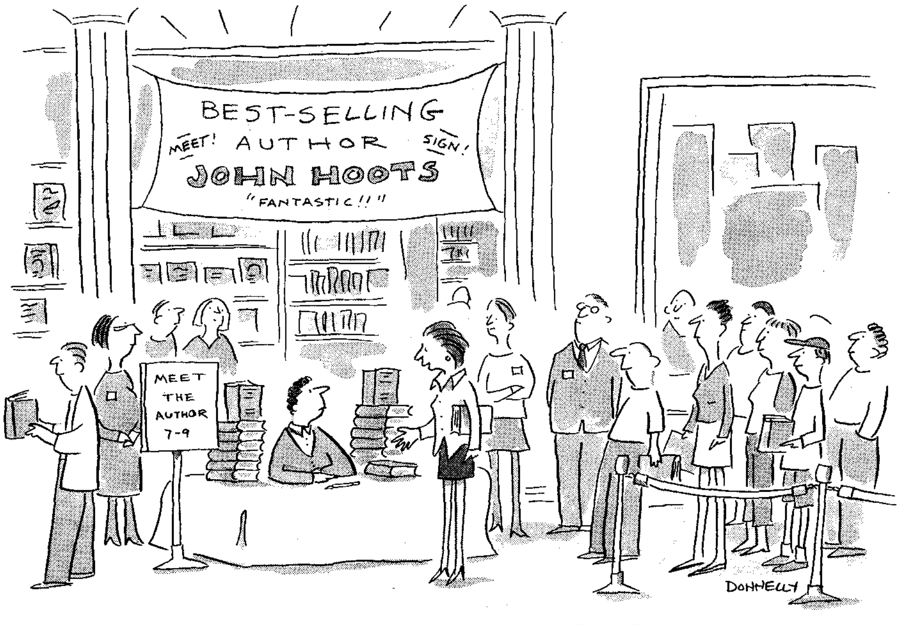

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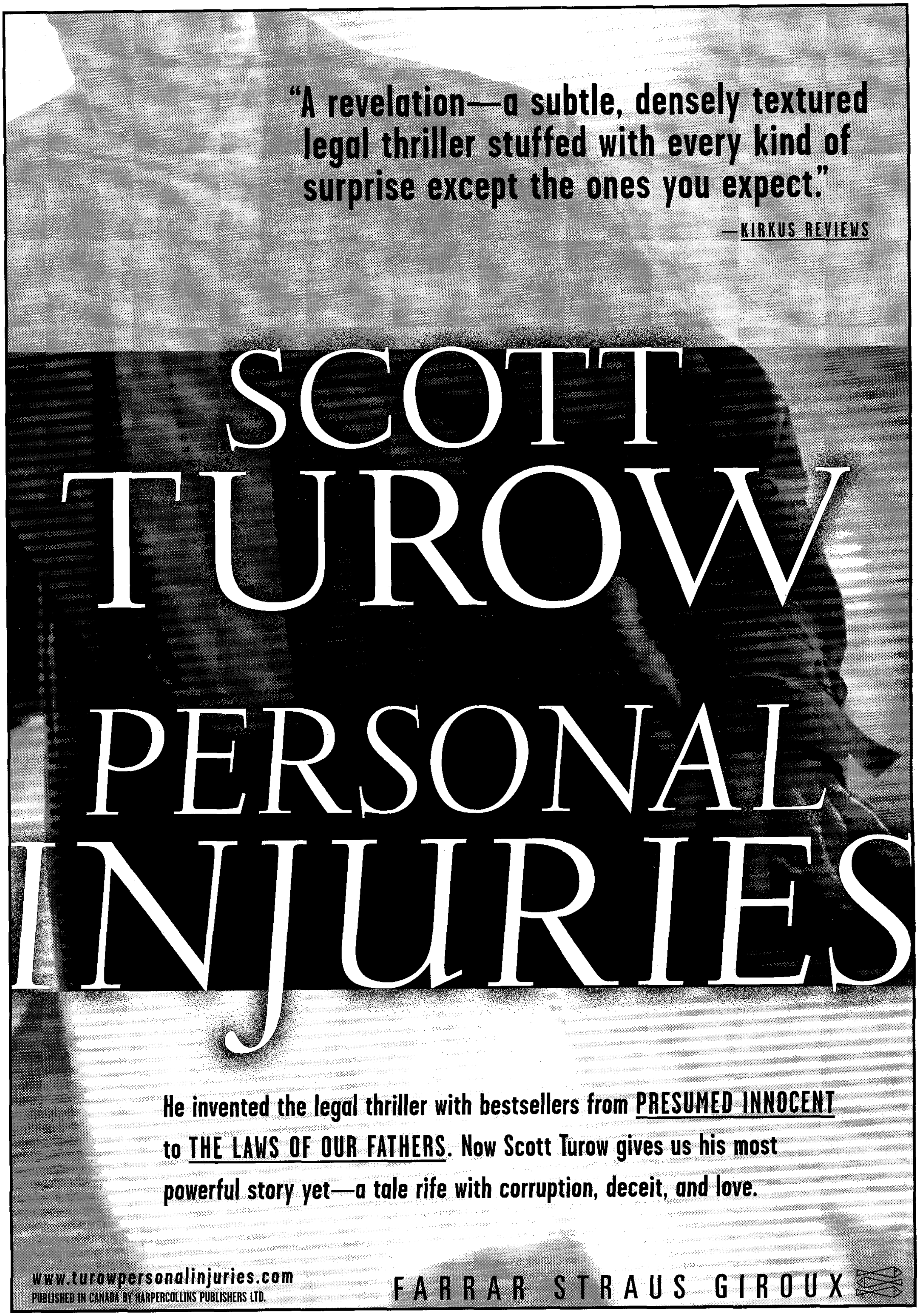

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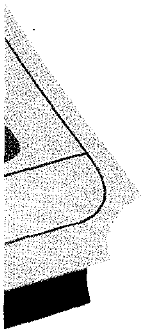

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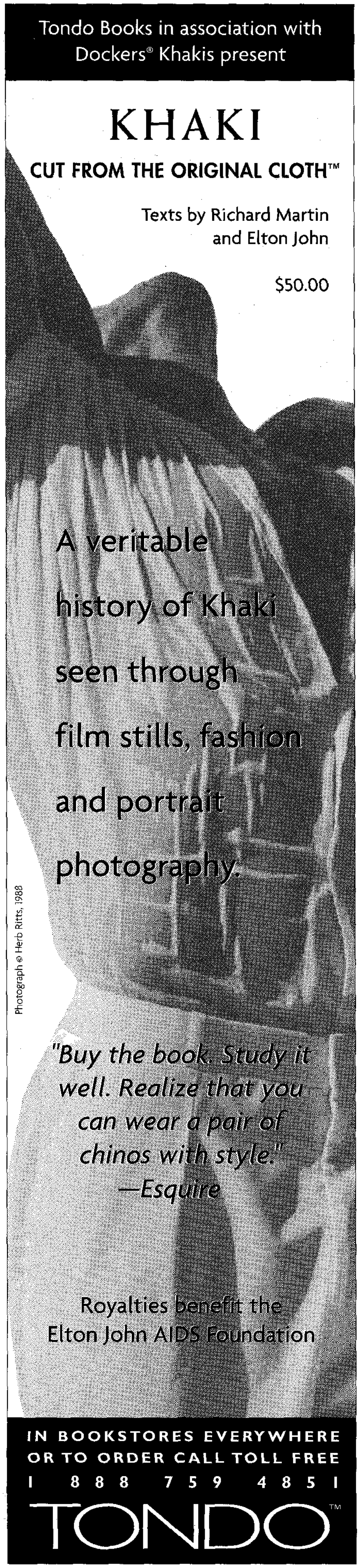
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WHAT'S TO CELEBRATE?

In his review of two new books about the Disney-built town of Celebration, Florida (Books, September 6th), Kurt Andersen doesn't acknowledge that the New Urbanist design of planned communities like Celebration isn't "urban" at all. And the fakery of Celebration should not be excused as mere aesthetic nostalgia. These McTowns represent an abandonment of cities for the safety of gated communities, and showcase the willingness of middle-class Americans to pay big bucks to separate "us" from "them." Celebration is a cornerstone in Disney's agenda to package a tidy, white-bread fantasy as a stand-in for the real world.

KELLY BYRNE
West Hollywood, Calif.

Kurt Andersen notes with gentle understatement that "private corporate entities . . . tend to be a little fascistic," but fails to carry his own point further. The question is not whether or not Celebration is a fake town, but rather what the relationship is between its citizens and its managers. If Disney could request a change to an invocation written by the town's Presbyterian minister, then the company exercises a degree of influence that could pose a threat to residents' civil liberties, not to mention seriously blurring the traditional distinction between the government and the private sector.

JESSE SANFORD
New York City

A BREAK WITH TRADITION

A bris can be an uplifting and beautiful ceremony (The Talk of the Town, September 6th), for everyone except the person at its center. What on earth can it mean to a seven-day-old, except helpless agony? "Because we've done it for a very long time" didn't justify slavery or foot-binding, and it doesn't justify cutting the genitals of any child, male or female. Circumcision, whether religious or secular, doesn't benefit the child—it just relieves the parents' anxieties.

HUGH YOUNG
Pukerua Bay, New Zealand

THE BLEACHER BLUES

Roger Angell (The Sporting Scene, September 13th) might be overly optimistic when he writes that Tiger fans "will be back next year for more of the same, wherever the game happens to be played." Tiger Stadium was—and is—the nation's great proletarian ballpark, with 5,800 bleacher seats among the 46,864 total, and with the majority of those seats having great, close views. Replacing that stadium with one that seats roughly forty thousand, and selling most of those seats as season tickets, is an act of criminal greed. The recent outpouring of weepy nostalgia misses the point: the current Tiger Stadium has better access and greater intimacy for working-class fans than any park ever built. And now the real fans will be shut out.

MICHAEL BETZOLD
Ann Arbor, Mich.

MAE WEST ON THE MOON

Believe it or not, John Whalen focussed too closely on the Hollywood psychic Criswell's more credible predictions (The Talk of the Town, September 6th). While searching through a friend's magazine collection, I found a "Criswell Predicts" column in the June, 1955, issue of *Spaceway Science Fiction.* Criswell announces that Mae West will win the 1960 Presidential election on a pro-space travel platform and will fly to the moon in 1965, as part of a delegation including herself, Criswell, and George Liberace. President West will be unimpressed with the lunar landscape.

Criswell presented all this not as prognostication, but as a factual report sent back in time. For myself, I'll stick with Neil Armstrong.

STEPHEN PERSING
Wethersfield, Conn.

•

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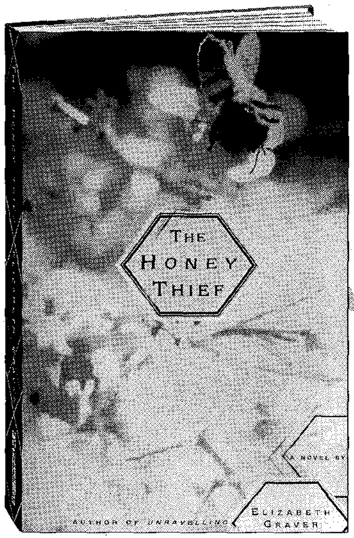

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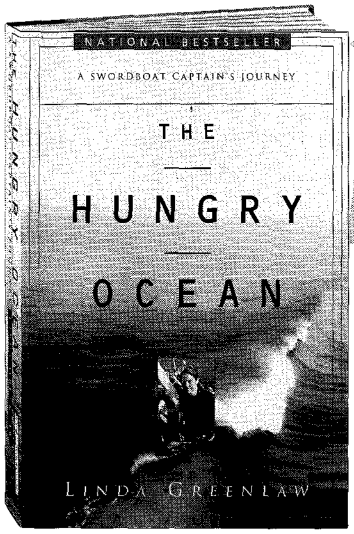

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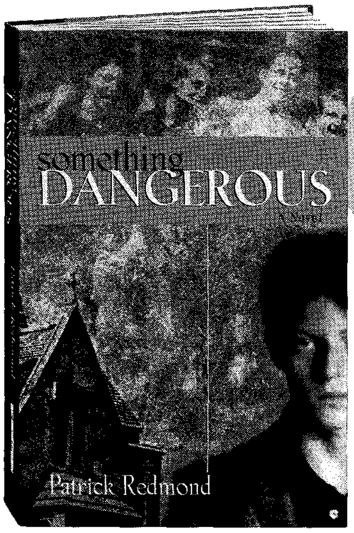

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Ancestral Voices—A staged reading, with a rotating cast, of A. R. Gurney's play, in which a Buffalo grandmother disrupts her family when she divorces her husband to marry his best friend. The first cast: David Aaron Baker, Philip Bosco, Blythe Danner, Edward Herrmann, and Elizabeth Wilson. Sundays at 7:30 and Mondays at 8. In previews. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

Atlantic Theatre Company—The troupe celebrates its fifteenth year with a season of plays by co-founder David Mamet. First up: "The Water Engine" and "Mr. Happiness." In previews. (336 W. 20th St. 645-1242.)

Chesapeake—In a new play by Lee Blessing, Mark Linn-Baker stars as a performance artist scheming to sabotage the right-wing politician who wants to cut his N.E.A. funding. Previews begin Sept. 30. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 246-4422.)

The Clearing—The Blue Light Theatre Company's season opener is a drama by Helen Edmundson, set in Ireland during Cromwell's occupation, about the marriage of an English aristocrat and his Irish wife. In previews. (McGinn/Cazale, Broadway at 76th St. 279-4200.)

Contact—A dance-play about romantic dreams, told in three parts and set to the music of Stéphane Grappelli, Puccini, Benny Goodman, the Beach Boys, and the Squirrel Nut Zippers, among other musicians and composers. Co-conceived by Susan Stroman (choreography and direction) and John Weidman (book). In previews. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

The Country Club—From the Drama Dept., a new comedy by Douglas Carter Beane, about a group of burned-out Wasps in their thirties, who gather during eleven holidays over the course of a year. Opens Sept. 29 at 8 and continues through Nov. 6. (Greenwich House, 27 Barrow St. 541-8441.)

A Cry from the City of Virgins—In Juro Kara's tragicomedy, which is directed by Sujin Kim, a woman undergoing surgery has a disturbing dream about her unborn sister from which she cannot awake. Sept. 29-Oct. 1 at 8 and Oct. 2 at 3 and 8. (Japan Society, 333 E. 47th St. 752-3015.)

Dame Edna: The Royal Tour—Calling all possums: the singer, swami, grief counsellor, and children's book illustrator makes her Broadway début. In previews. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Epic Proportions—Kristin Chenoweth heads the cast of a new comedy by Larry Coen and David Crane, set in the thirties in the Arizona desert, during the filming of a Hollywood Biblical epic. Jerry Zaks is the director. Preview on Sept. 29. Opens Sept. 30 at 6:30. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

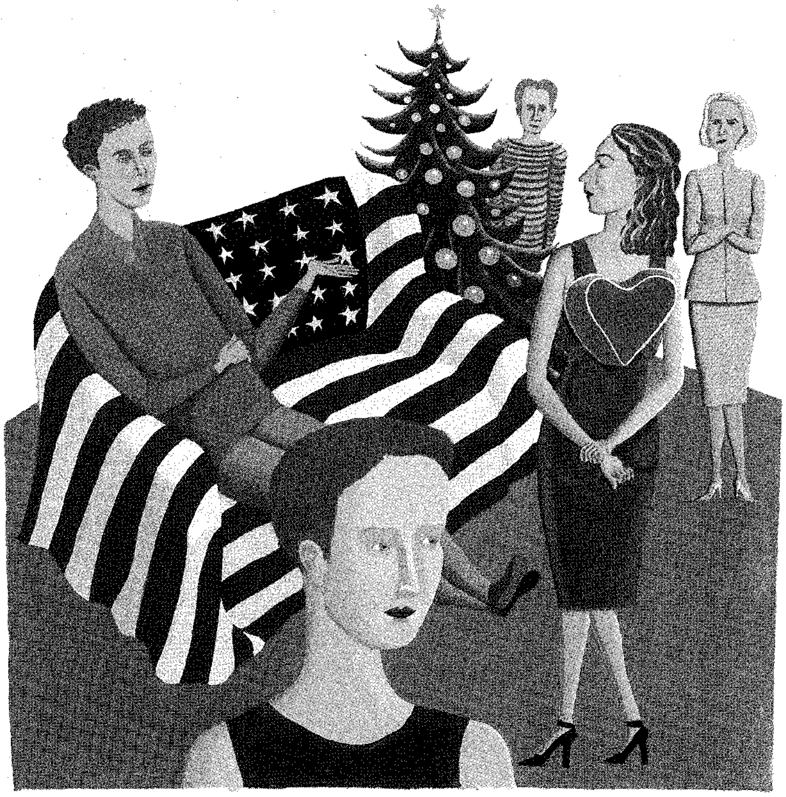
Fully Committed—New York's most fashionable restaurant is the setting for Becky Mode's comedy, in which an unemployed actor turned reservations clerk must cope with the crowd vying for a table. Nicholas Martin is the director. Preview on Sept. 29. Opens Sept. 30 at 8. (Vineyard Theatre, 108 E. 15th St. 353-3366.)

Give Me Your Answer, Do!—Brian Friel's latest play, which centers on the rivalry between two writers. The cast includes Kate Burton, Helen Carey, Michael Emerson, John Glover, Gawn Grainger, Joel Grey, and Lois Smith. Presented by the Roundabout. In previews through Oct. 3. Opens Oct. 5 at 7:30. (Gramercy, 127 E. 23rd St. 777-4900.)

James Joyce's The Dead—A musical version of the short story, starring Christopher Walken, Blair Brown, Stephen Spinella, Alice Ripley, Emily Skinner, Daisy Eagan, Paddy Croft, and John Kelley, among others. With a book by Richard Nelson, music by Shaun Davey, and lyrics by Mr. Nelson and Mr. Davey. Jack Hofsiss is the director. Previews begin Oct. 1. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

Necromance: A Night of Conjuration—The performance artist, storyteller, magician, and humorist Derek Hughes, in his latest work. In previews through Oct. 3. Opens Oct. 4 at 8 and continues, Fridays and Saturdays, through Oct. 30. (Dixon Place, 309 E. 26th St. 532-1546.)

Nuyorican Stories: Culture Clash in the City—The comedy troupe Culture Clash (Richard Montoya, Ric Salinas, and Herbert Siguenza) sends up New York art and politics of the past three decades, in an exploration of the lives of several well-known Puerto



Tom Everett Scott, Cynthia Nixon, Frederick Weller, Callie Thorne, and Amy Sedaris, in "The Country Club," by Douglas Carter Beane.

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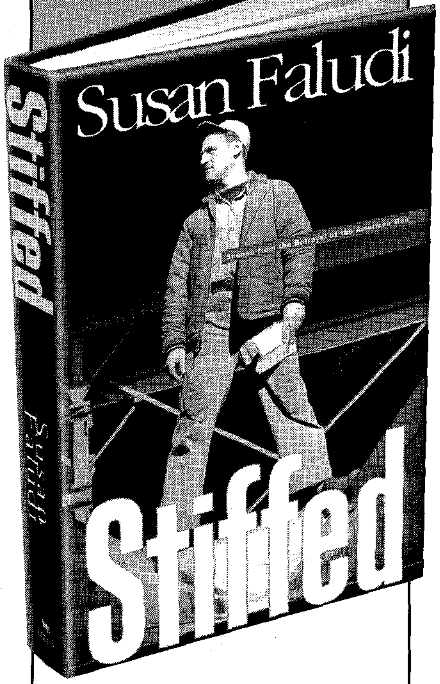

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Rican, Chicano, and African-American citizens. Opens Sept. 29 at 8. (INTAR 53, 508 W. 53rd St. 279-4200.)

Saturday Night Fever—The musical, based on the 1977 film. With music by the Bee Gees. Directed and choreographed by Arlene Phillips. In previews. (Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

Stars in Your Eyes—A musical by Chip Meyrelles, set in two small towns during the Kennedy Administration, in which the Man in the Moon (James Stovall) guides the lives of six people (John Braden, David M. Lutken, Heather Mac Rae, Crista Moore, Christy Carlson Romano, and Barbara Walsh). Previews begin Oct. 1. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 239-6200.)

The Vagina Monologues—Eve Ensler, in her one-woman disquisition. In previews through Oct. 2. Opens Oct. 3 at 7. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

Varla Jean Merman Is the Bad Seedling!—The TWEED Fractured Classicks series presents Ms. Merman (a.k.a. Jeffery T. Roberson) as the darkly naughty eight-year-old Rhonda Skidmore, in a musical parody of the Maxwell Anderson drama "The Bad Seed." In previews. (Mother, 432 W. 14th St. 358-3436.)

OPENED RECENTLY

Avenue A—The 29th Street Rep's production of David Steen's drama about the effects of urban decay. (212 W. 29th St. 465-0575.)

The Beauty Part—S. J. Perelman's 1962 comedy, set in nineteen-fifties New York and Hollywood, about the aristocrat Lance Weatherwax and his pursuit of a bohemian girl. (Bank Street Theatre, 155 Bank St. 591-0564. Closes Oct. 10.)

Big Blonde—Dorothy Parker's short story, adapted for the stage by Peter Mattaliano, who also directs, and starring Jennifer Spahr. (113 Gallery, 113 Ludlow St., between Delancey and Rivington Sts. 253-1813. Closes Oct. 10.)

Chekhov Now Festival—A three-week celebration offering contemporary stagings of twenty-one of the playwright's works, including a hip-hop version of "Uncle Vanya" set in Harlem, puppet adaptations of two short stories, and a rock-and-roll adaptation of "Ivanov." (Access Theatre, 380 Broadway, near White St. 414-7773. Closes Oct. 10.)

The Countess—Gregory Murphy's play, which tells the story of how the nineteenth-century art critic John Ruskin's wife left him for the painter John Everett Millais, is a vivid exploration of the self-indulgent pleasures of small-mindedness (in this case, Ruskin's and his parents'). The script is funny and intelligent, if a bit overlong, and the cast does a wonderful job of revealing the characters' complete inability to communicate with—or even understand—each other, personally or artistically. Jennifer Woodward is particularly strong as Mrs. Ruskin, in a portrayal of the depths of passion and despair it can take to break free. Directed by Ludovica Villar-Hauser, with luxurious period costumes by Christopher Lione. (Samuel Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 594-2826.)

The Exact Center of the Universe—Joan Vail Thorne's comedy, in which a small-town Southerner (Reed Birney) is torn between his overbearing mother (Frances Sternhagen) and his sweetheart (Tracy Thorne). (Century Theatre, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.)

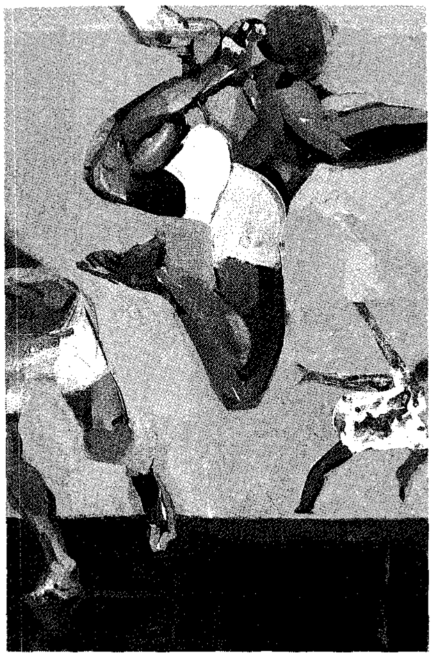
The Gathering—A Shabbat dinner set during the spring of Reagan's controversial visit to Bitburg (the German cemetery where, it is believed, Nazi soldiers are buried) turns into political crossfire between a Dachau survivor (Ben Hammer) and his son (Robert Fass), who is a speechwriter for the President. It could have been a sombre, if not overly burdened, affair, were it not for the comic tone of the tightly scripted first act. The mood slows to a more ponderous pace in the second. (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 239-6200.)

Invasions and Legacies—Tommy Makem, in an evening of Irish folk songs and storytelling. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737. Closes Oct. 9.)

Kat and the Kings—A rock-and-roll musical by Taliep Petersen and David Kramer, set in Cape Town in 1957, about a doo-wop group trying to make it big. Mr. Kramer is the director. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

Mirandolina—The Pearl Theatre Company opens the season with Goldoni's "La Locandiera," in which four suitors compete for the hand of a Florentine boarding-house owner, in a new translation by Michael Feingold. (80 St. Marks Pl. 598-9802.)

The Right Size—The British comedy duo of Sean Foley and Hamish McColl bring their West End hit, "Do You Come Here Often?," to P.S. 122. (Reviewed in our issue of 9/27/99.) (150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. Closes Oct. 10.)



The Ronald K. Brown/Evidence dance troupe, in "Water," at the Joyce Theatre.

RICCARDO VECCHIO

Signature Theatre Company—The Maria Irene Fornes season begins with two one-acts, "Mud" and "Drowning," directed by David Esbjornson. (555 W. 42nd St. 244-7529.)

A Streetcar Named Desire—Elizabeth Marvel portrays Blanche DuBois, in Ivo van Hove's staging of Tennessee Williams's play. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 460-5475. Closes Oct. 10.)

Summer '69—A revue tracing a group of music fans' trip to the original Woodstock festival. (Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

Sundays Out of Country—A cocktail party turns into a revealing series of play readings, in a comedy of manners by Judy Elkan. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 533-4650. Closes Oct. 17.)

A Tale of Two Cities—A new adaptation of the Dickens novel, written and directed by Will Pomerantz, and staged in two parts. Part One will be performed on Wednesdays and Fridays at 8, Part Two on Thursdays and Saturdays at 8, and both parts on Sundays at 3 (Part One) and 7 (Part Two). (The Salon, 49 Bleecker St., at Lafayette St. 539-3670.)

Things You Shouldn't Say Past Midnight—Peter Ackerman's screwball bedroom comedy consists mainly of a sublimely ridiculous conference call involving three pairs of lovers. The questions about sex and the proper balance between intellectual and physical attraction have no answers, but Ackerman has some interesting suggestions, and, to his credit, comedy outweighs the theorizing. John Rando, the director, has a good eye, and the show comes off beautifully. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 580-1313.)

THWAK—Comic acrobatics (both physical and vocal) from the Australian performers David Collins and Shane Dundas, a.k.a. the Umbilical Brothers. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 307-4100.)

VOICES IN THE DARK—In this age of computer-generated gore, the actress Judith Ivey, playwright John Pielmeier ("Agnes of God"), and director Christopher Ashley have achieved the impossible, a truly thrilling stage thriller. It's a classic plot: Ivey plays a radio-talk-show host who gets a call from a wacko, then heads off to an isolated cabin for a peaceful weekend—oops! Ivey and the writing are smart and funny, and the scares are both unanticipated and really scary; the plot includes some nice twists, and the supporting cast carry the whole thing off with style. (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

THE WEIR—Conor McPherson's play takes place in the musty chill of a backwater Irish pub, where a handful of habitués chew the cud of their solitude, spinning ghostly yarns. It has a bittersweet charm, but for all the well-crafted talk and the well-observed bonhomie, it is finally a shaggy-bog story. (4/12/99) (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

THE WINDS OF GOD—Two contemporary Tokyo comedians killed in a motorcycle wreck are reincarnated as Second World War kamikaze pilots, in a comedy by Masayuki Imai, who co-stars. (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 840-3074.)

LONG RUNS

ANNIE GET YOUR GUN: Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100. . . . **BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **CABARET:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200. . . . **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **CHICAGO:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **DEATH OF A SALESMAN:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200. . . . **DE LA GUARDA:** Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **FOOTLOOSE:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100. . . . **FORBIDDEN BROADWAY:** Stardust, Broadway at 51st St. 239-6200. . . . **FOSSE:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH:** Jane Street Theatre, Hotel Riverview Ballroom, 113 Jane St. 239-6200. . . . **I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT, NOW CHANGE:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200. . . . **IT AIN'T NOTHIN' BUT THE BLUES:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200. . . . **JEKYLL & HYDE:** Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **LATE-NITE CATECHISM:** St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE LION KING:** New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100. . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **MISS SAIGON:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **OVER THE RIVER AND THROUGH THE WOODS:** John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. . . . **PERFECT CRIME:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **RAGTIME:** Ford Center for the Performing Arts, 213 W. 42nd St. 307-4100. . . . **RENT:** Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000. . . . **SECRETS EVERY SMART TRAVELER SHOULD KNOW:** Ibis, 327 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **SIDE MAN:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **SMOKEY JOE'S CAFÉ:** Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200. . . . **STOMP:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at St. Marks Pl. 477-2477. . . . **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200. . . . **WIT:** Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.

DANCE

PHILADANCO—The Philadelphia Dance Company performs works by Elisa Monte ("Dreamtime"), Billy Wilson ("Rosa"), Milton Myers ("Joy"), and George Faison ("Suite Otis"). (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. Oct. 1 at 7, Oct. 2 at 2 and 7, and Oct. 3 at noon and 5. Through Oct. 10.)

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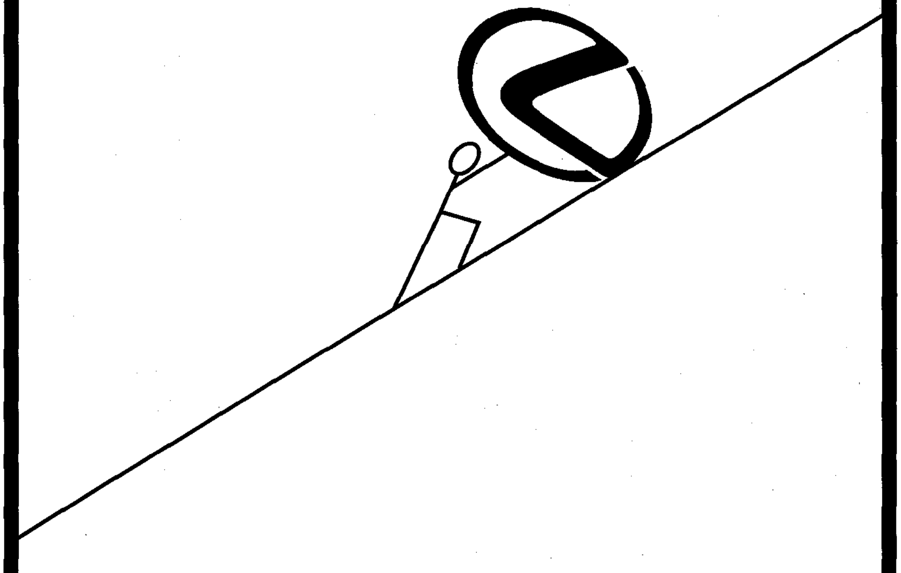

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Ronald K. Brown/Evidence—The troupe presents three works by the Brooklyn-born choreographer: "Ebony Magazine: to a village," which contrasts runway-model postures with exuberant movement rooted in African dance; "Water," which turns the gestures of washing into a sort of prayer; and "Upside Down," about persistence in times of chaos. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Sept. 28-Oct. 1 at 8, Oct. 2 at 2 and 8, and Oct. 3 at 2 and 7:30.)

Dance Theatre of Harlem—The company marks its thirtieth anniversary with performances of repertory works by Balanchine ("Bugaku," "The Four Temperaments," and "The Prodigal Son") and by founder Arthur Mitchell ("Firebird Finale" and "Manifestations"), as well as newer pieces and premières by Geoffrey Holder, Dwight Rhoden, and resident choreographer Robert Garland. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Sept. 28-Oct. 1 at 8, Oct. 2 at 2 and 8, and Oct. 3 at 3.)

Dance Theatre Workshop—Sept 28-29 at 8: Jean Vitrano in "Love's Body" and Nami Yamamoto in "H(a)i." (Through Oct. 8.) . . . ¶ Sept. 30-Oct. 1 at 8: David Parker and the Bang Group in "Beatification." (Through Oct. 10.) . . . ¶ Oct. 2 at 8 and Oct. 3 at 3: Ellis Wood and her company in "Home for the Naked." (219 W. 19th St. 924-0077.)

"New York on New York"—Three programs by twelve New York choreographers, featuring works on aspects of the love-hate relationship we all seem to have with the city. (Danspace Project, St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. Oct. 1-3 at 8:30. Through Oct. 10.)

"Lava Love"—Sarah East Johnson's troupe, Lava, presents a slate of circus-skill routines—trapeze and balancing acts, hoop diving, human pyramids, hula-hoop and pogo-stick numbers—performed with subtleties of pace and emphasis taken from the world of dance. Johnson likes to compare both the power of women and the dynamics of love to volcanic forces, but she keeps such themes subterranean. Adults sense the undercurrent of muscular eroticism, kids love the dog act. (Flea Theatre, 41 White St. 226-0051. Sept 30-Oct. 1 at 8 and Oct. 2 at 3 and 8. Through Oct. 30.)

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

Gov't Mule—A bristling Allman Brothers offshoot led by slide guitarist Warren Haynes. (Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. 307-7171. Sept. 30 at 7:15.)

"The Original Fresh Fest"—The freaks come out at night: old-school rap with Run-D.M.C., the Sugar Hill Gang, Kurtis Blow, Melle Mell, and Whodini. (Hammerstein Ballroom, Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. 564-4882. Sept. 30 at 8.)

"Take It Like Amanda!"—A program of original songs, both humorous and serious, by the singer Amanda Green, author of the tunes "Every Time a Friend Succeeds, A Little Piece of Me Just Dies Inside" and "Took a Lot of Money to Look This Cheap." (West Bank Café, 407 W. 42nd St. 695-6909. Thursdays at 8. Through Oct. 28.)

Dance Hall Crashers—California ska punk. (Westbeth Theatre Center, 151 Bank St. 741-0391. Oct. 1 at 8.)

Los Van Van—On its current United States tour, Cuba's most popular dance band has almost been creating more controversy than music—Miami's mayor called them "the official Communist band of Fidel Castro," and the band had to rely on the A.C.L.U. to secure a performance date in that city. Leave the politics at home and come for the electrifying rhythms. With *laud* master Barbarito Torres. (Hammerstein Ballroom, Manhattan Center. Oct. 1 at 9:30.)

"The Family Values Tour"—This surprisingly well-balanced feast of masculinity features a little something for everyone from the pop-music salad bar. Heavy-duty headliners Limp Bizkit are the current chart-topping dough-boys of agro-rock; Filter (a Nine Inch Nails offshoot) offers titanium-enriched industrial rock, DMX is an artful rapper whose beats and samples are consistently unpredictable; Crystal Method brings a little inspired energy to the listless world of electronica. (Nassau Coliseum. 516-794-9300. Oct. 2 at 7.)

Marc Anthony—Having been challenged by the marketing juggernaut that is Ricky Martin, the anti-Ricky finally begins his own much hyped adventure in English. There's no question that Anthony is the superior singer (he also towers over Enrique Iglesias and Luis Miguel, the other Latin stars of the moment), but Anthony has a scholarly persona that seems wrong for magazine photo spreads. Can he move the merchandise? With the deep pockets of Sony behind him, don't be surprised. (Hammerstein Ballroom, Manhattan Center. Oct. 3 at 8.)

Royal Trux, at the Cooler.

JOHN RITTER

CLUBS

(Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

Baktun, 418 W. 14th St. (206-1590)—An intimate industrial space that recently celebrated going legal—last month it threw a forty-eight-hour dance marathon upon receiving approval for a cabaret license from the city. Oct. 5: Giant Step, a local record label and concert-promoting outfit that grew out of its eponymous roving dance parties of the early nineties, presents **RAINER TRÜBY** and **MICHAEL REINBOTH,** two of Germany's most musically adventurous d.j.s, in their New York City début.

Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—Oct. 4-5: **THE CHURCH.** This evocative guitar-driven Australian quartet, led by vocalist Steve Kilbey, was thought to have been a casualty of the end of the New Wave era (the group's best records were made in the eighties). But its return bodes well for fans of languid melodies and world-weary jangling.

Brownies, 169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—Sept. 30: **CHAMPALE.** This shifting assemblage (a guitar trio fleshed out with the occasional horn, string, bell, or whistle) produces a plaintive sound that indicates an understanding of the notion that sometimes a whisper carries farther than a wail. Their live shows are sonic excursions into the grimy beauty of the city. Also on Sept. 30: **CLEM SNIDE.** If Hank Williams had been born in Israel, had come of age in the post-punk era, and had hung out with the art-school crowd, he might have turned out a bit like Eef Barzelay, the lanky front man of this quartet. Barzelay's front-porch ballads and lilting, whimsical waltzes are haunted by images of Dairy Queens and bus trips into the unknown, and the band, with its earthy emphasis on cello and upright bass, gives them just the right amount of hopeful melancholy.

The Cooler, 416 W. 14th St. (229-0785)—Oct. 1: **ROYAL TRUX** is an evolving group centered around Pussy Galore veteran Neil Hagerty and former Calvin Klein model Jennifer Herrema. Their new album is called "Veterans of Disorder," and it's an apt title. Since they started recording together more than a decade ago, Hagerty and Herrema have battled drug addiction and overwhelming art-rock pretensions that made their music a major challenge to the senses. But they've cleaned up their act, and in recent years they've demonstrated a command of many idioms, from rock opera to Southern rock. Their new disk is no exception; it's a gleefully hard-hitting collection packed with Herrema's smoky vocals and Hagerty's gritty guitar work.

Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Sept. 29: The Brazilian percussion ensemble **OLODUM,** on the same bill with their compatriot singer **JULIANA AQUINO.** Oct. 1: **MELANIE C,** the artist still best known as Sporty Spice, becomes the second Spice Girl to embark on a solo career (though she hasn't actually left the band). Spice fans here will get a sneak preview of "Northern Star," Mel C's upcoming CD. What will it sound like? "I love all music," the young condiment recently told MTV News, "so it's just gonna be a cross-section, a mishmash." Oct. 4-5: **LUSCIOUS JACKSON,** the band named after an obscure Philadelphia 76ers basketball player, tries to recapture the minor glory of its 1996 album, "Fever In Fever Out," which produced the hit single "Naked Eye."

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Sept. 30-Oct. 1: **ISOTOPE 217** creates beautiful sonic tapestries, sometimes atmospheric, sometimes funky and intense, using hypnotic strands of guitar, cornet, trombone, and percussion. Sept. 30-Oct. 2, in the intimate Old Office space: **MARC RIBOT Y LOS CUBANOS POSTIZOS.** Downtown's answer to Ry Cooder's Buena Vista Social Club, Ribot's prosthetic Cubans appropriate the arrangements of Arsenio Rodriguez and other pre-Castro bandleaders. Oct. 2: Former Golden Palominos vocalist **SYD STRAW.** Oct. 5: Czech Gypsy singer and pianist **IDA KELAROVA.**

Rodeo Bar, 375 Third Ave., at 27th St. (683-6500)—Oct. 4: Blues guitarist **BILL SIMS,** whose family life is currently the subject of the ten-part PBS series "An American Love Story."

S.O.B.'s, 204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—Sept. 29-30: **ISRAEL (CACHAO) LOPEZ,** the eighty-one-year-old Cuban bassist who with the help of his brother, Orestes, invented mambo back in the late thirties.

Wetlands, 161 Hudson St. (966-4225)—Sept. 30: Dave Matthews' guitarist **TIM REYNOLDS.**

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—Sept. 29: Who would have thought that Denmark, of all places, would produce a band like the brash **PIERRE DORGE AND THE NEW JUNGLE**

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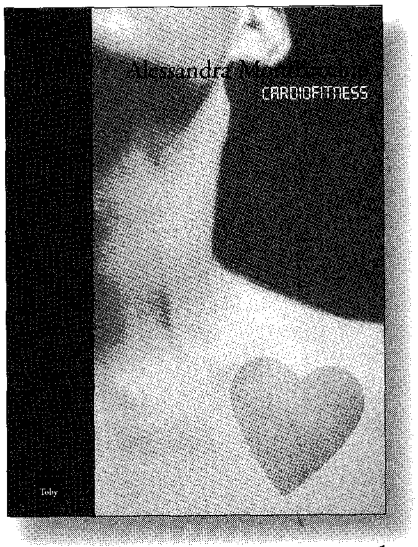
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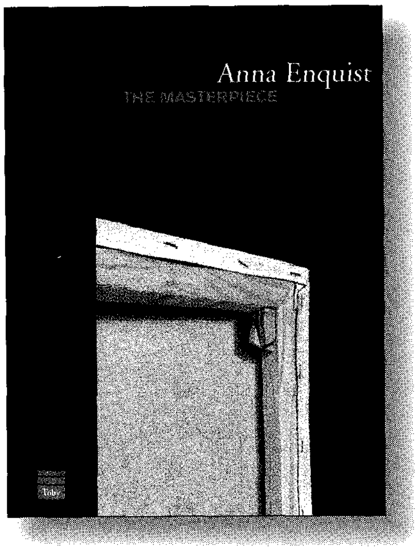
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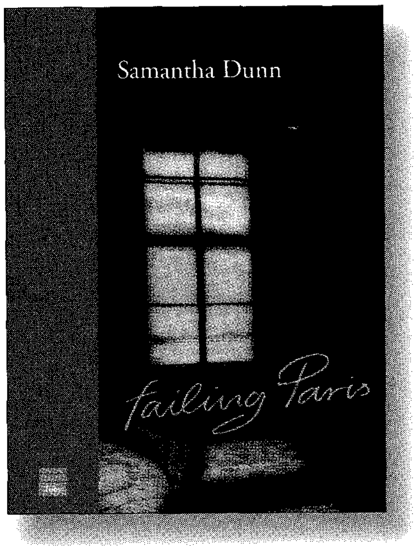
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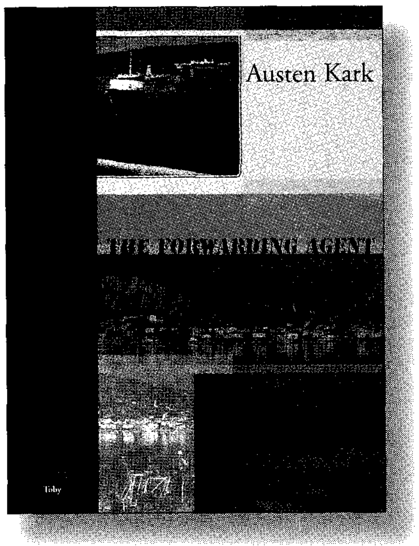
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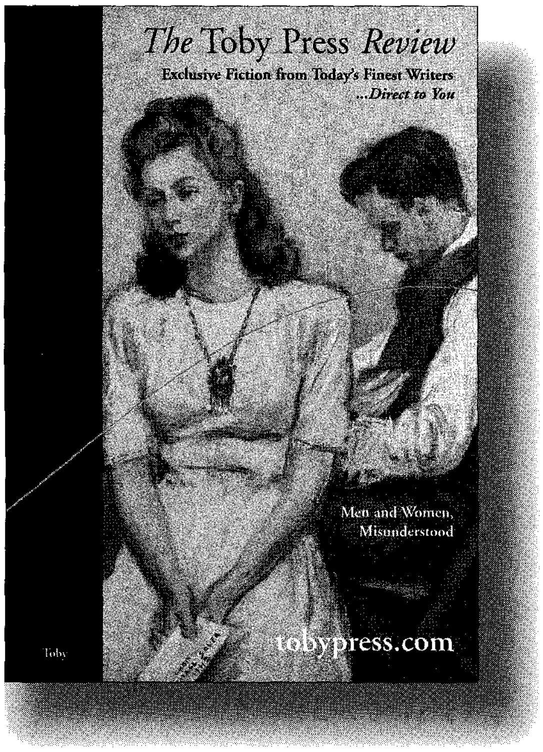

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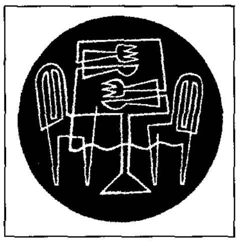
TABLES FOR TWO



ANGELICA KITCHEN, 300 E. 12th St. (228-2909)—They won't go so far as to pretend to think it's funny when you ask for a medium-rare filet, but for the most part the staff at this sunny ten-year-old vegan café in the East Village traffics more in friendly Zen vibes than in pious culinary politics. The front of the Japanese-influenced, mostly organic menu proclaims Angelica's "deep respect for the environment and our gratitude toward the dedicated people who produce our food," but, unlike a lot of other serious vegetarian places, the food tastes like a reward rather than a punishment.

If one of the scruffily elegant waitresses arrives, practically brokenhearted, with the news that the kitchen will not substitute baked tofu for tempeh in one of the inventive daily specials, a Dragon Bowl is just as nice; it's a heaping, layered dish of things that leave you feeling both satisfied and virtuous: rice, beans, tofu, sea vegetables, and steamed vegetables topped with a choice of dressing. The dressings, spreads, and sauces here—tahini-scallion, carrot-ginger, rich sesame, and live curried cashew (which sounds revolting but is actually hard to stop eating)—help boost the food onto a higher plane; most of them taste great just drizzled on a slice of the moist, rustic cornbread, which is thick as a brick, and almost as heavy.

Lunch is serious wheat-head time, but at night a more relaxed (and less P.C.) crowd brings bottles of wine, the candles on the little wooden tables give the cinnamon-and-gold-stencilled walls a warm glow, and otherwise regular meat eaters dine peacefully alongside vegetarians. After a plate of garlicky pickled kelp and vegetables and a bowl of *dashi* and noodles, it's pleasant to savor the remains of your wine (or twig tea or apple cider), have a little blueberry kanten parfait with almond-cashew cream, and watch the crowd lumbering up and down Twelfth Street. (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Entrées $5-$14.)

BLUE NOTE, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through Oct. 3: The **BILLY TAYLOR** trio and the **TERENCE BLANCHARD** sextet. Taylor's piano work mirrors his personality, which is sturdy, erudite, and resolutely mainstream./As Spike Lee's own Bernard Herrmann, trumpeter Blanchard has turned out quite a few vibrant and atmospheric film scores—and, as his recent "Jazz in Film" exhibits, he's a fine interpreter of earlier cinematic compositions—but his capabilities as a jazz soloist aren't in danger of being overlooked. Dining.

BOTTOM LINE, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—Oct. 2: The **MIKE STERN** group. Like most contemporary jazz guitarists, Stern has a bad case of run-on fingers, but his silken tone and bebop flair keep things listenable.

CARLYLE HOTEL, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and, through Oct. 9, **BARBARA COOK.** Monday evenings belong to the **EDDIE DAVIS NEW ORLEANS JAZZ BAND,** featuring **WOODY ALLEN** on clarinet. . . . ¶ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, **PETER MINTUN** is in attendance through Oct. 9.

FIREBIRD CAFÉ, 365 W. 46th St. (586-0244)—Sept. 29-Oct. 1: **KT SULLIVAN** hails from Boggy Depot, Oklahoma, but she's a sophisticate at the core. The soprano's chameleonic vocal style is all over the map; Barbara Cook and Cleo Laine are just two points of reference among many. Sullivan's shows usually include a generous helping of the sort of Broadway and Hollywood songs that endure long after the musicals for which they were written. Her current program is a tribute to composer Jerome Kern.

IRIDIUM, 44 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through Oct. 3: The **DAVID MURRAY** octet. One of the most pleasing aspects of Murray's playing is that, unlike the majority of saxophonists in his generation, he *doesn't* sound like John Coltrane. Yet if the timbre is more Sonny Rollins and the outside-the-lines effects are indebted to Albert Ayler, the soulfulness and sheer intensity of Murray's improvisations are heartfelt nods to the Master himself. And anyone who's heard Murray embrace Coltrane's "Naima" knows that this still-vital player has a true understanding of Coltrane's message. Mondays belong to electric-guitar innovator **LES PAUL.**

JOE'S PUB, 425 Lafayette St. (539-8770)—Oct. 4-5: Chanteuse **UTE LEMPER.**

KNITTING FACTORY, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Oct. 4: Clarinettist **DON BYRON** gets freaky with his band Existential Dred.

SWEET BASIL, 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—Through Oct. 3: The **DONALD HARRISON** quartet. Harrison's days as a strait-laced neoconservative are long over. The New Orleans-born jazz saxophonist is now happy mixing and matching jazz with Mardi Gras Indian chants, Meters-style funk, and contemporary hip-hop. But when the mood strikes, he can still race a bebop tune into a sweat. Dining.

TONIC, 107 Norfolk St. (358-7503)—Sept. 30: **JOHN ZORN** may dislike the comparisons of his majestic band Masada with both Ornette Coleman and klezmer music, but what's the problem? If alto saxophonist Zorn, trumpeter **DAVE DOUGLAS,** drummer **JOEY BARON,** and bassist **GREG COHEN** reach the spirited heights of unfettered and brilliant interplay of the early Coleman quartets and the deep, often ecstatic, soulfulness of klezmer—and they do—they should appreciate the compliments. Oct. 5: The **WILLEM BREUKER KOLLEKTIEF** is crazy like a fox. Trafficking in disciplined anarchy, these spectacularly skilled Dutchmen mate classical precision to free-jazz ideas and spice it all with Marx Brothers antics. They're irreverent, virtuosic, and downright funny.

UP OVER JAZZ CAFE, 351 Flatbush Ave., at Seventh Ave., Brooklyn (718-398-5413)—Oct. 1-2: The **ERIC ALEXANDER** and **JIM ROTUNDI** quintet.

VILLAGE VANGUARD, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through Oct. 3: The impish powerhouse pianist **CYRUS CHESTNUT,** who's practically become an institution on the New York jazz scene. The **VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA** holds sway on Mondays.

WEST BANK CAFÉ, 407 W. 42nd St., at Ninth Ave. (695-6909)—Sept. 29: The **MICHAEL WOLFF JAZZWORLD WORKSHOP** (see Birdland).

ZINC BAR, 90 W. Houston St. (477-8337)—Sept. 28-29: The **MARK EGAN** trio. Egan, one of the most creative electric bassists to have come of

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October 3

ARISTOCRATS
October 10, 17, 24

LOST FOR WORDS
October 31

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November 21, 28

CIDER WITH ROSIE
December 5

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December 19, 26

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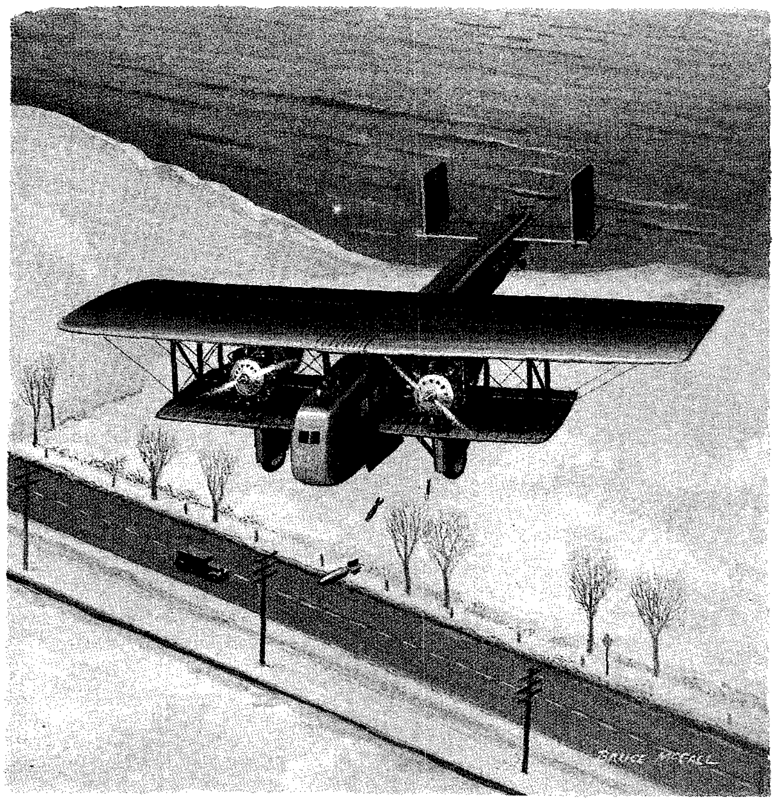

"Mob Bomber, Chicago, 1929," by Bruce McCall, at James Goodman.

age in the shadow of Jaco Pastorius, has never let his extravagant technique take precedence over his solid musical instincts. Saturdays and Sundays feature Brazilian jazz.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—While the Whitney prepares its paean to the second fifty years of the American century, its sister institution has put together a sombre and ravishing survey of five hundred years of the millennia of Egyptian dynasties. But not just any five hundred years; "Egyptian Art in the Age of the Pyramids" covers the Old Kingdom (2650-2150 B.C.), the glorious formative period of Pharaonic art when the great pyramids were built and religious statuary rose to a refined naturalism. It's a big show, with more than two hundred and fifty carved stone figures and reliefs borrowed from thirty museums, but the presentation feels spare and clear. Among the most stunning pieces is a seated sumo-size figure of Hemiunu, the probable architect of the Great Pyramid of Giza, whose dimpled navel and swollen breasts are the world's earliest—and certainly most majestic—record of middle-aged spread. At the other end of the social spectrum, the show includes a few of the rare representations of ordinary Egyptians, including a potter, a butcher, and a cook glumly dropping a hoof into a cauldron of stew. Through Jan. 9. . . . ¶ As part of the run-up to the museum's exhibition of Ingres portraits, which opens Oct. 5, "Costume and Character in the Age of Ingres" gathers examples of the court fashions popular in the artist's heyday, from undergarments (chemises, corsets, petticoats, crinolines) to elaborately detailed formal wear in the sort of vibrant colors and opulent fabrics that Ingres depicted. Through Nov. 21. . . . ¶ "Daido Moriyama: Hunter," an exhibition of forty photographs made in postwar Japan. Through Jan. 2. (See also the Japan Society.) (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—"To be a good Abstract Expressionist painter," Robert Rauschenberg once said, "you have to be able to feel really sorry for yourself." That was something that Rauschenberg, perhaps the world's most angstless and ebullient artist, was not able to do. Instead, he began making a kind of bemused, cheerful anti-Abstract Expressionism, an art that combined the viscous freedom of Ab Ex brushwork with the astringent presence of trash and bric-a-brac. The result, as a small exhibition of his nineteen-fifties "Combine" paintings reminds us, was magic: for a few years Rauschenberg couldn't put two things together in an uninteresting way. Through Oct. 5. . . . ¶ "The Un-Private House." Through Oct. 5. . . . ¶ "Fame After Photography." Through Oct. 5. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—Selections from the permanent collection are on display. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

Whitney Museum of American Art, Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—The second half of America's mid-career retrospective, covering art from 1950 to now, has just opened, with a list of works that will supply fodder for art-world argument for the next few months and into the subsequent century. Through Feb. 13. (Open Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

American Museum of Natural History, Central Park W. at 79th St. (769-5100)—At the center of the new Gottesman Hall of Planet Earth is an eight-foot hemispherical model of our mother ship, rigged with an internal projection system that displays her clouds, oceans, and continents, all in motion. Ranged around it are a hundred and sixty-eight chunks of the planet itself. . . . ¶ "The Endurance: Shackleton's Legendary Antarctic Expedition." Through Oct. 11. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Brooklyn Museum of Art, Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—"Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection," the provocative show from London's Royal Academy in

London, opens Oct. 2, with paintings, sculptures, photographs, and installations by Damien Hirst (of the sliced mammals), the Chapman Brothers (randomly situated genitalia), Jenny Saville, Mona Hatoum, Rachel Whiteread, and other baddies from the sceptered isle. . . . ¶ "Winslow Homer: Illustrating America." Through Oct. 10. (Open Wednesdays and Fridays, 10 to 5; Thursdays, 10 to 8; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

Japan Society, 333 E. 47th St. (832-1155)—"Daido Moriyama: Stray Dog" presents a hundred and thirty photographs by the Japanese artist. Through Jan. 2. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 11 to 6; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, 22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—"The Promise of Photography: Selected Works from the DG Bank Collection," curated by Alana Heiss and Klaus Biesenbach, presents contemporary photographic practice in diverse, vibrant, and accomplished variety. Most trends are represented, from Bill Henson's haunting, painterly portrait to Dan Graham's conceptual "landscapes" to Craigie Horsefield's film-noir images. Other highlights include Candida Hofer's depopulated photographs of corporate interiors, an intensely colored photographic storyboard by Tracey Moffatt, and Andy Warhol's portrait of Karol Wojtyla, cheekily titled "Self-Portrait." A straightforward exhibition that lets the work speak for itself. Through Oct. 24. . . . ¶ "The Artist Out of Work: Art & Language 1972-1981," a room-long rant of floor-to-ceiling agitprop by an on-again, off-again Anglo-American art collective. Featuring archival stuff like political posters, feuilletons, card files, transcripts of informal conversations, and two mock Pollock paintings, this exercise in preaching to the converted seeks, yet again, to pummel that all-purpose art-world tackling dummy: the modern artist. Art & Language's style is well summarized by words the group printed on a musical score: "A whole life of nothing to say is a life full of saying 'I have nothing to say' or 'I will say nothing.'" We should be so lucky. Through Oct. 24. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.)

Grisha Bruskin / Magdalena Abakonwicz—Twenty-five figurines and more than a hundred plates by this Russian-born artist. The statuettes, one series in porcelain, another in silver, are based on Stalinist propaganda and portray such characters as a man in a gas mask holding a model of a burning house. The plates, which combine text and image, vary in subject matter from whimsical and political to downright confusing—as in one from his "Alphabet" series, where a camel is accompanied by the legend "The neophyte is a new convert to religion." The gallery walls are painted black, perhaps to offset the white porcelain, but it only adds to the drudgery of looking at one tchotchke after another. / A series of ink-and-charcoal drawings, loosely based on wildflowers. Both shows through Oct. 5. (Marlborough, 40 W. 57th St. 541-4900. Open Mondays.)

Luisa Caldwell—"Cow Palace," an installation inspired by the artist's recent visit to northern India, is a theatrical homage to Mughal culture by way of the Pattern and Decoration movement. Architectural elements such as scenic flats, florid wallpaper, and a free-standing arch are punctuated by a beaded mandala, bronze weights cast in the shape of a bell or lotus, and a pair of tables whose colored-resin tops encase strings of beads. The back gallery features a psychedelic video projection. The various components fail to come together: the show's centerpiece, a life-size fibreglass sacred cow, could just as well have been a white elephant. Through Oct. 16. (Sculpture Center, 167 E. 69th St. 879-3500.)

Cathy de Monchaux—"Mordant Rapture," a creepy, seductive show of objects by a young British sculptor short-listed for last year's Turner Prize. "Dunce (Mind Tenant)," installed in a corner, could be a shaman's wig or a futuristic cat-o'-nine-tails. Some sculptures feature an ominous vaginal motif, invoking the terrors of pleasure. At once primal and sophisticated, these allusive objects in brass, leather, velvet, and mink suggest implements of torture and elaborate fetishes. (Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 1018 Madison Ave., at 78th St. 744-7400. The exhibition continues downtown at Sean Kelly, 43 Mercer St., 343-2405. Both shows through Oct. 21.)

Bruce McCall—In the tongue-in-cheek retro utopianism of this frequent *New Yorker* contributor, skies are typically blue: Prussian blue over an improbably highbrow Times Square, cerulean over a rousing game of tank polo. Even when the skies turn sepia—as they do in "New York's Transportation Future," a ferry-port scene filled with pedicabs and electric buses—it's an oddly sunny sepia. McCall's tomorrowland vistas, filled with military and civilian flying machines and luxury liners rendered in the style of fifties architectural drawings, bring back all the zany earnestness once perpetrated in the name of progress. Through Oct. 16. (James Goodman, 41 E. 57th St. 593-3737.)

Ray Yoshida—Collages by an eccentric Chicago-based artist and teacher. In his latest work, Yoshida returns to an idiom he first developed in the sixties, composing with small brightly colored fragments excised from the borders of newspaper cartoons. Arranged neatly in rows, these odd snippets of imagery (a shoulder, a steering wheel, part of a desk) require—and inspire—the patience of a numismatist. Their text-balloon titles, however, evoke the bittersweet pleasures that all collectors know: "Tsk!" and "Dang!" and "Mmph" and "Aha!" A modest but entirely charming show. Through Oct. 9. (Baumgold, 128 E. 72nd St. 861-7338.)

Short List—**debra bermingham** and **paul wonner,** DC Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 247-2111. Both shows through Oct. 2. . . . **herman braun-vega,** Haime, 41 E. 57th St. 888-3550. Open Mondays; through Oct. 2. . . . **herbert brown,** Gat, 1100 Madison Ave., at 82nd St. 327-0441. Through Oct. 15. . . . **beauford delaney** and **harold cousins,** Rosenfeld, 24 W. 57th St. 247-0082. Both shows through Oct. 30. . . . **holly lane,** Schmidt Bingham, 41 E. 57th St. 888-1122. Through Oct. 16. . . . **james lechay,** Kraushaar, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 307-5730. Through Oct. 13. . . . **catherine lee,** Galerie Lelong, 20 W. 57th St. 315-0470. Through Oct. 16. . . . **mark podwal,** Forum, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 355-4545. Through Sept. 25. . . . **tom sachs,** Boone, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 752-2929. Through Oct. 25. . . . **jacques villeglé,** Ubu, 16 E. 78th St. 794-4444. Through Oct. 23. . . . **henry ward,** Tatistchieff, 50 W. 57th St. 664-0907. **steve wheeler,** York, 21 E. 65th St. 772-9155. Open Mondays, closed Saturdays; through Oct. 23. . . . **jack youngerman,** Washburn, 20 W. 57th St. 397-6780. Through Oct. 30.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Céleste Boursier-Mougenot—A fleet of blue-and-white bowls and the occasional wineglass float in five inflatable kiddie pools. The crockery is kept in motion by a pump; the acoustics of the spacious gallery enhance the accidental music. While the gallery resounds with clinking chimes, you can pull up a chair and watch a bumper-car water ballet straight out of Morandi. Clearly, the French artist cum composer is influenced by the chance operations of John Cage. Still, you sympathize with gallery staff: delightful as the experience may be, after eight hours on duty, Cage's 4' 33" of silence would come as a blessed relief. Through Oct. 16. (Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 255-1105.)

Diana Cooper—Meandering constructions, at once intricate and whimsical, like the 3-D doodlings of a genius sixth grader. Built from a host of PlaySkool-inspired art mate-

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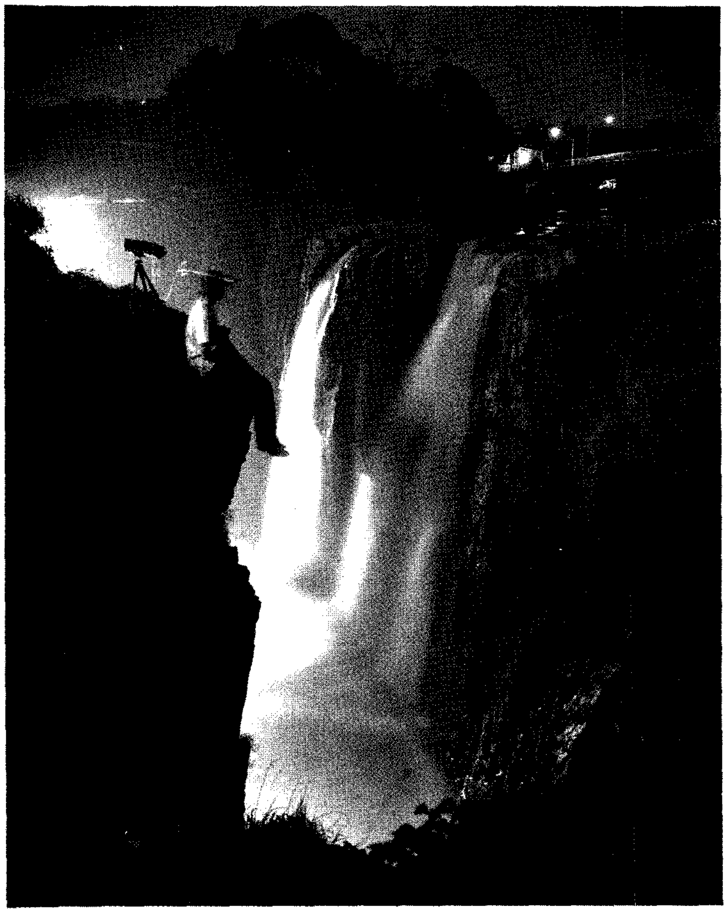
rials, including foam core, pipe cleaners, cellophane, and pompoms, Cooper's geometric fantasies generally reach, vine-fashion, into the viewer's space or spill out onto the floor. In the past, her works seemed like a joyfully unruly species of abstract painting, out of Piranesi by way of Terry Winters. Here they seem to be leaving painting behind, becoming simply a form of fantastical, circuit-based architecture. Cooper's last show generated widespread acclaim; this one is better. Through Oct. 9. (Postmasters, 459 W. 19th St. 727-3323.)

Joy Episalla—This artist treats her own photographs the way sculptors treat their raw materials: she arranges them on the floor, stacks them, and sometimes even—why not?—installs them on the walls. The photographs themselves are mostly closeups of domestic objects, enlarged to the point where they become seductively grainy and unfamiliar. A four-foot-long brass zipper looks oddly at home on the gallery's concrete floor. Two soiled white pillows, shot in a cool greenish light, have the bulky grace of seacows lolling in an aquarium. And curtains, Episalla's favorite subject, billow with calculated but irresistible glamour. Through Oct. 9. (Debs, 529 W. 20th St. 647-7080.)

Till Freiwald—Breathtaking portraits, in watercolor, by a young German painter who has muscled in on Chuck Close territory. Freiwald's format is even more unvarying than Close's: each of these large, brightly lit, deadpan mug shots features a studentish face, simplified almost to the point of anonymity. Their luminously granular skin tones, interrupted only by the sudden darks of eyes and mouth and hairline, produce a little Kate Moss-ian shock every time: how can something so bland be so mesmerizing? The secret, or part of it, is in Freiwald's technique, a sly combination of airbrush effects and traditional washes. Through Oct. 9. (Shainman, 513 W. 20th St. 645-1701.)



"Paterson Great Falls," by Shigeyoshi Ohi, at Silverstein.

Pat Lipsky / David McDonald—Abstract paintings by an artist who was prominent in the seventies, disappeared in the eighties, and seems to have now recovered her equilibrium. The new works are handsomely geometric, in a style that descends from Mondrian and Klee: vertical stripes of color slide past each other, changing scale and hue, as if on a mechanized loom. It's a classic modernist idiom, handled with more zest than one has any right to expect. / Small cylindrical sculptures by an English artist with a fondness for coy, Zen-like effects. One piece consists of plaster disks, affixed to the gallery walls like prehistoric dimmer switches. The installation has a low-key charm, but one wishes for less tact and more electricity. Both shows through Oct. 9. (Harris, 529 W. 20th St. 463-9666.)

Omar Lopez-Chahoud—A messy, site-specific installation combining painting, sculpture, drawing, collage, and a B movie that presents circuses as a paradigm for the artist's work. Lopez-Chahoud's salad-bar approach has him grazing at every contemporary artistic trend without making a real meal of any. The piles of found photographs, press clippings, and maps, supposedly inspired by nineteenth-century curiosity cabinets, fail to captivate. Through Oct. 9. (DeChiara Stewart, 521 W. 26th St. 967-6007.)

Giles Lyon—Large paintings of swirling lines in bright, acid-flashback colors. Made up of intestinal forms and studio debris (dirt, hair clippings, and stickers from Chiquita bananas), Lyon's work is a sort of twentieth-century grab bag: Surrealist-inspired automatic line, Pollock-style numinousness, sixties Pop flipness, nineties cartoon aesthetics. Through Oct. 16. (Feigen, 535 W. 20th St. 929-0500.)

David Shapiro—Life masks of artists and critics, cast in tofu, displayed in vats of water, in a refrigeration unit. At the opening, the artist cut and served some of the work, with a vegetable or meat curry. Shapiro has also created a video game (produced by John Groh, of Jed Brain Pictures), based on a bad LSD trip he endured as a teen-ager, which ended with him naked on the L.I.R.R. Psychedelia flashes by as the player negotiates the transitscape, picking up "bad trip survival rations" (i.e., packets of ketchup). Wonderfully unhinged. Through Oct. 16. (Liebman Magnan, 552 W. 24th St. 255-3225.)

"Fax-Bak"—Bank, an English artists' collective, presents the results of a public-service project: they faxed galleries back their own press releases, with comments and an overall grade (one reads, "Overly verbose; full of overblown claims and exhausting hyperbolic sales pitch"; another, "Incomplete sentence! Always read over what you've written"). They also painted some completely extraneous watercolors on top of their edited releases, none of which manage to obscure the passages of richly deserved snideness they have penned in the margin. Through Oct. 16. (Goldsworthy, 453 W. 17th St. 414-4560.)

Short List—**WILLIAM L. HAWKINS**, Ricco/Maresca, 529 W. 20th St. 627-4819. Through Oct. 9. . . . **CLAIRE JERVERT**, Martz, 529 W. 20th St. 206-3686. Through Oct. 9. . . . **SUSANNE KÜHN**, Maynes, 529 W. 20th St. 741-3318. Through Oct. 9. . . . **SOL LE WITT**, Cooper, 521 W. 21st St. 255-1105. Through Nov. 16. . . . **HOLLY MILLER**, Clementine, 526 W. 26th St. 243-5937. Through Oct. 16. . . . **DAN PETERMAN**, Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 627-6000. Through Oct. 16. . . . **ALDO ROSSI**, Protetch, 511 W. 22nd St. 633-6999. Through Oct. 16. . . . **ANDREAS SLOMINSKI**, Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 206-7100. Through Oct. 16. . . . **JOSEPH STASHKEVETCH**, Morris, 465 W. 23rd St. 727-2752. Through Oct. 16.

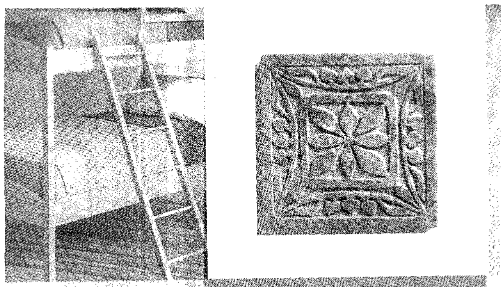
GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Margaret Kilgallen / Lane Twitchell—An installation (i.e., the walls are covered with paintings on plywood, tin, and stitched-canvas squares) by a former book conservator and avid surfer. The room teems with the evidence of both passions: random words in frontier-style typography float alongside various surfer silhouettes. Kilgallen gets her paint free, from a recycling center where left-over colors are mixed experimentally (apparently into pale shades of butterscotch, pistachio, strawberry, and root beer). The tramp-art images, too, look salvaged from a sort of myth-redemption center: a locust tree, a pair of fistfighting mamas, surfer women in turn-of-the-century swimwear. The tumult of this scruffy, nostalgic stuff manages to feel both random and rhythmic. / Strips of colored tissue paper, cut into elaborate designs. Decorative, but with an ironic, autobiographical bite. Both shows through Oct. 9. (Deitch Projects, 76 Grand St. 343-7300.)

Yutaka Sone—Three marble miniatures set inside a potted-plant jungle and a fourth made of various natural materials like seaweed and tree branches. Sone's stone sculptures invoke the history of Western statuary with less traditional subjects, such as a roller coaster, with a car teetering at its highest point. The exhibition's best work presents a chiselled view of the island of Hong Kong, its trunklike base lifting into a tiny scale version of the city's raucous skyline. A question: Is this pillar-of-salt Hong Kong under British or Chinese rule? Through Oct. 9. (Zwirner, 43 Greene St. 966-9074.)

"Monumental Drawings"—Larger-than-life images from a medium traditionally considered intimate and precious. Presenting a grab bag of eleven mostly known folks together with five emerging artists, the exhibition relies on various gems for brilliance. There's Alice Maher's "Ombre" triptych, a study of different hair days, featuring frizzy, straight, and wavy; Joyce Pensato's gargantuan portrait of a bug-eyed Lisa Simpson; Mark Dean Veca's funky jungle version of Greek mythology; and Mark Lombardi's constellationlike diagram of an international financial scandal. Through Oct. 30. (Exit Art, 548 Broadway. 966-7745.)

Short List—**KAREN ARM** and **BRETT REICHMAN**, P.P.O.W, 476 Broome St. 941-8642. Both shows through Oct. 9. . . . **FRANCESCO CLEMENTE**, Blum, 99 Wooster St. 343-0441. Through Nov. 6. . . . **CEAL FLOYER**, Kaplan, 48 Greene St. 226-6131. Through Oct. 9. . . . **SHIRAZEH HOUSHIARY**, Lehmann Maupin, 39 Greene St. 965-0753. Through Oct. 30. . . . **OLIVIER MOSSET**, Brownstone, 39 Wooster St. 334-3455. Through Oct. 23. . . . **TOM NAKASHIMA**, Steinbaum Krauss, 132 Greene St. 431-4224. Through Oct. 9. . . . **PEPÓN OSORIO**, Feldman, 31 Mercer St. 226-3232. Through Oct. 9. . . . **ALISON SAAR**, Kind, 136 Greene St. 925-1200. Through Oct. 30.



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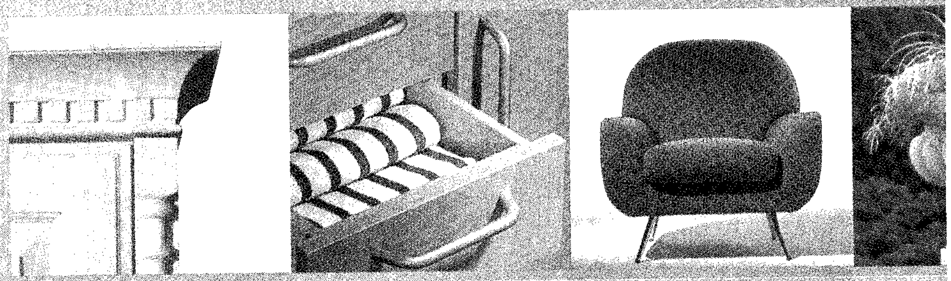

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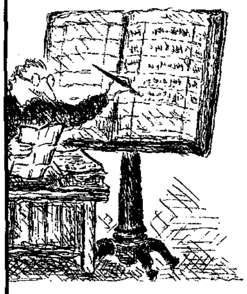

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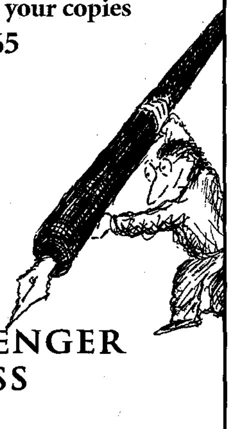

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AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Sotheby's—Sept. 30: An auction of modestly priced Impressionist and modern art works, including a Renoir drawing, Dufy watercolors, and Picasso sculptures; also, a couture sale that includes the wedding suit Marilyn Monroe wore when she married Joe DiMaggio. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

Christie's—Sept. 29: European furniture, carpets, and decorative art. . . . ¶ Oct. 1: Collectible wines, with an impressive offering of champagne (just in time to stock up for millennial celebrations). . . . ¶ Oct. 4-5: A two-day photography auction. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 636-2000.). . . ¶ At **CHRISTIE'S EAST**: Sept. 29: American paintings. . . . ¶ Oct. 5: Nineteenth-century paintings. (219 E. 67th St. 606-0400.)

Doyle—Sept. 29: An auction of nineteenth- and twentieth-century decorative art. . . . ¶ Oct. 5: Golf memorabilia, including a 1566 book that includes the first printed reference to the game. (175 E. 87th St. 427-2730.)

Phillips—Photography. (406 E. 79th St. 570-4830. Oct. 5.)

New York Armory Antiques Show—A hundred dealers with a wide range of offerings, from Egyptian and Chinese antiquities to nineteenth-century furniture. (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. Sept. 29-Oct. 3. For information, call 472-1180.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

"A Century of Times Square"—Photographs from the hundred-year-old archives of the New York *Times*. Through Oct. 23. (Greenberg, 120 Wooster St. 334-0010.)

"Eyewitness 1999"—The best press photographs of 1998, selected by the World Press Photo Foundation. Through Oct. 10. (North Bridge, World Financial Center, Battery Park City. Open daily, twenty-four hours.)

"Female"—Another gender-based group show curated by Vince Aletti. Among the dozens of artists on view are Marianne Courville, Bruce Cratsley, John Dugdale, Mitch Epstein, Emmet Gowin, Jacques Henri Lartigue, Vik Muniz, and Rosalind Solomon. Through Oct. 10. (Wessel and O'Connor, 242 W. 26th St. 242-8811. Open Sundays.)

Group Show—New work by Lawrence Beck (black-and-white photographs of tulips), Elger Esser (color landscapes), and Hiroshi Sugimoto (movie-house interiors). Through Oct. 30. (Sonnabend, 420 West Broadway. 966-6160.)

International Center of Photography—"Sea Change: The Seascape in Contemporary Photography." Through Oct. 10. . . . ¶ "Myths, Dreams, and Realities in Contemporary Argentine Photography." Through Oct. 10. (1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. 860-1777. Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10 to 5; Fridays, 10 to 8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6.)

International Center of Photography Midtown—"Bill Brandt: A Retrospective." Through Oct. 31. (Sixth Ave. at 43rd St. 860-1777. Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10 to 5; Fridays, 10 to 8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6.)

Short List—**DAVID ARMSTRONG**, Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 243-0200. Through Nov. 6. . . . **JENNIFER BOLANDE**, Alexander and Bonin, 132 Tenth Ave., at 19th St. 367-7474. Through Oct. 16. . . . **ALVIN BOOTH** and **FERENC BERKO**, Richardson, 560 Broadway. 343-1255. Both shows through Oct. 9. . . . **ELINOR CARUCCI**, Ricco/Maresca, 529 W. 20th St. 627-4819. Through Oct. 9. . . . **JIM DINE**, Pace Wildenstein, 142 Greene St. 431-9224. Through Oct. 23. . . . **MITCH EPSTEIN**, Sikkema, 530 W. 22nd St. 929-2262. Through Oct. 16. . . . **ADAM FUSS**, Cheim & Read, 521 W. 23rd St. 242-7727. Through Oct. 16. . . . **SAMUEL GOTTSCHO**, Alan Klotz/Photocollect, 22 E. 72nd St. 327-2211. Closed Tuesdays; through Oct. 23. . . . **MIMMO JODICE**, Burden, 20 E. 23rd St. 505-5555. Through Nov. 6. . . . **MARCUS LEATHERDALE**, Bridgewater/Lustberg & Blumenfeld, 560 Broadway. 941-6355. Through Oct. 16. . . . **DAVID MALIN**, Schickler, 560 Broadway. 431-6363. Through Nov. 6. . . . **SALLY MANN**, Houk, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 750-7070. Through Nov. 6. . . . **CONSTANTINE MANOS**, Leica, 670 Broadway. 777-3051. Opens Saturdays at noon; Through Oct. 23. . . . **MARIA MARTINEZ-CAÑAS**, Saul, 560 Broadway. 431-0747. Through Oct. 9. . . . **RICHARD MISRACH**, Mann, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 25th St. 989-7600. Through Oct. 23. . . . **YASUMASA MORIMURA**, Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 206-9100. Through Oct. 16. . . . **DAIDO MORIYAMA** and **REAGAN LOUIE**, Laurence Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 397-3930. Both shows through Oct. 30. . . . **MARK MORRISROE**, Hearn, 530 W. 22nd St. 727-7366. Through Oct. 31. . . . **SHIGEYOSHI OHI**, Silverstein, 520 W. 21st St. 929-4300. Through Oct. 9. . . . **JOHN PFAHL**, Borden, 560 Broadway. 431-0166. Through Oct. 23. . . . **ALISON ROSSITER**, Morthland, 225 Tenth Ave., at 23rd St. 242-7767. Through Oct. 16. . . . **COLLIER SCHORR**, 303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 255-1121. Through Oct. 30. . . . **DAVID SEIDNER**, Staley-Wise, 560 Broadway. 966-6223. Through Oct. 9. . . . **JACK SPENCER**, Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St. 517-3766. Through Oct. 23. . . . **ANDRÉ STEINER**, Gallery 292, at 120 Wooster St. 431-0292. Through Oct. 23. . . . **DAN WINTERS**, SABA, 116 E. 16th St. 477-7722. Open Mondays, closed Saturdays; Through Oct. 22.

(See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, the American Museum of Natural History, and P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center.)

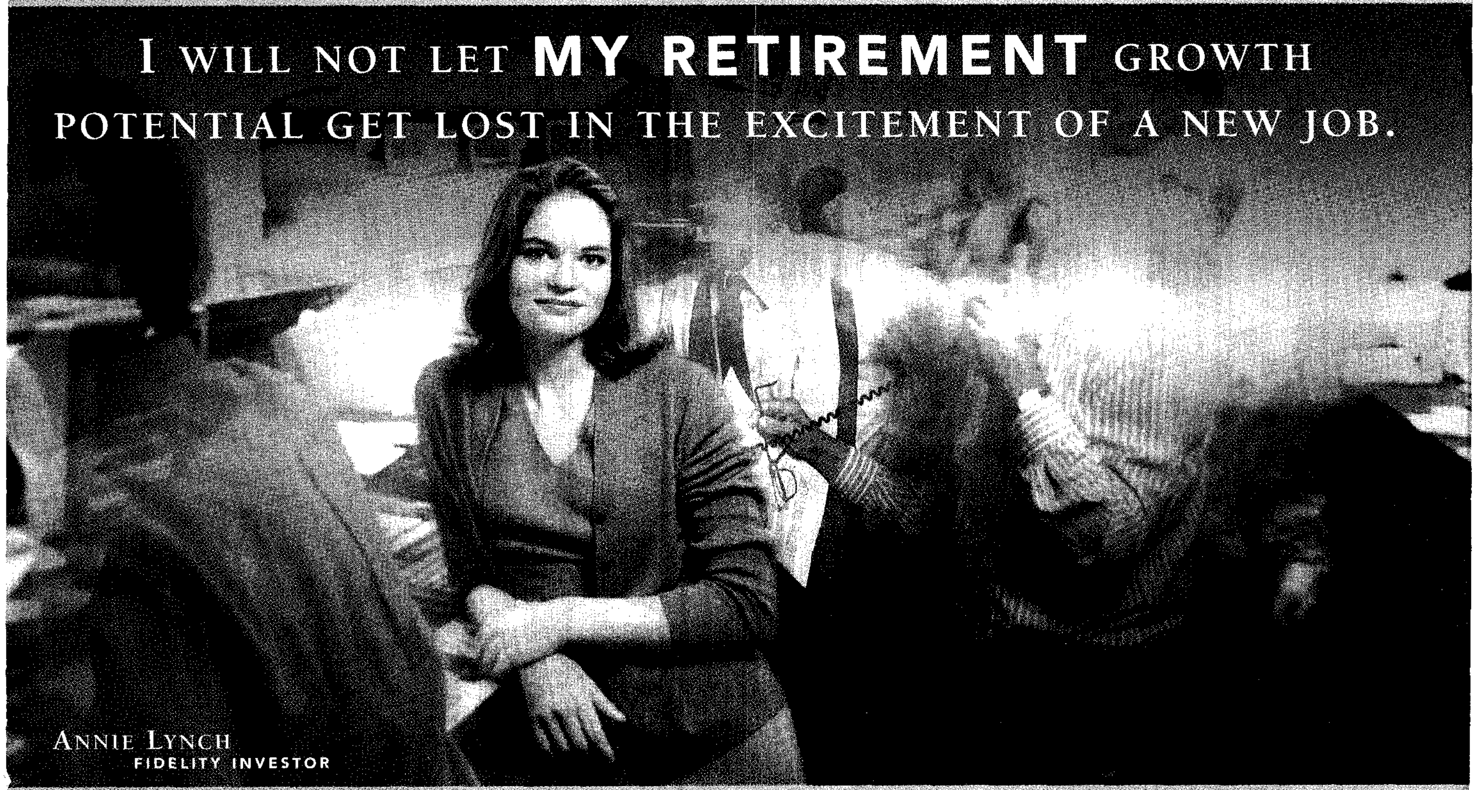
CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera—**LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR**, presented with a twist: whereas prominent portions of this perennial's title role, including the mad scene, have almost always been transposed down at the Metropolitan (thereby enabling star sopranos to interpolate dazzling high notes at the ends of arias), this year's performances hew to Donizetti's original keys, and the leading lady sings the climaxes as the composer wrote them. In restoring the entire tessitura of the heroine's part, Donizetti's key relationships are preserved and the anachronistic imposition of a few stratospheric notes is exchanged for greater over-all brilliance—an effect already explored by soprano Andrea Rost and conductor Charles Mackerras on their recording of the work for Sony Classical, which was released last year. The cast includes Ms. Rost, Frank Lopardo, Roberto Frontali, and Paul Plishka; conducted by Mr. Mackerras. (Sept. 29 and Oct. 5 at 8 and Oct. 2 at 1:30.) . . . A double bill of **CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA**, with Dolora Zajick, José Cura, and Nikolai Putilin, and **PAGLIACCI**, with Veronica Villarroel, Dennis O'Neill, Juan Pons, and Dwayne Croft. Carlo Rizzi conducts both. (Sept. 30 at 7:30 and Oct. 4 at 8.) . . . **MOSES UND ARON**, by Schoenberg, with Philip Langridge and John Tomlinson; James Levine. (Oct. 1 at 8.) . . . **OTELLO**, with Barbara Frittoli, Plácido Domingo, and James Morris; Mr. Levine. (Oct. 2 at 8:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

New York City Opera—Sept. 29 at 7:30: Rossini's "Il Viaggio a Reims." . . . ¶ Sept. 30 at 7:30, Oct. 2 at 1:30, and Oct. 5 at 7:30: Handel's "Ariodante." . . . ¶ Oct. 1 at 8 and Oct. 3 at 1:30: "Madama Butterfly." . . . ¶ Oct. 2 at 8: "The Magic Flute," performed in English. (New York State Theatre. 870-5570.)

"The Carbon Copy Building"—A so-called "comic book opera," with words and drawings by cartoonist Ben Katchor and music by Michael Gordon, David Lang, and Julia Wolfe. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 255-5793. Sept. 29, Oct. 1, and Oct. 5 at 8; Sept. 30 at 7; and Oct. 2 at 3 and 8; with the Sept. 30 performance being a benefit performance. Through Oct. 9.)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"Night Vision"—A work by Fred Ho that is billed as a "vampyre opera inspired by Hong Kong action cinema, Iraqi desert songs, crusader art, and Times Square erotica." (Great Hall, Cooper Union, Third Ave. at 7th St. For information about tickets, call 279-4200. Oct. 1-2 at 7:30.)

Amato Opera Company—Presenting "La Traviata." (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 228-8200. Oct. 2 at 7:30 and Oct. 3 at 2:30.)

"Songs and Stories from Moby Dick"—A Melville-derived performance-art piece created and performed by Laurie Anderson. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Oct. 5 at 7. Through Oct. 16.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic—Kurt Masur conducts Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto (featuring Sarah Chang) and Stravinsky's rarely performed melodrama "Perséphone," set to Gide's retelling of the Greek myth of the princess of springtime who marries the ruler of Hades and eventually splits her time between the upper world and the lower; with narrator Marthe Keller, tenor Stanford Olsen, the New York Choral Artists, and the American Boychoir. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. Sept. 30-Oct. 2 and Oct. 4 at 8 and Oct. 5 at 7:30.)

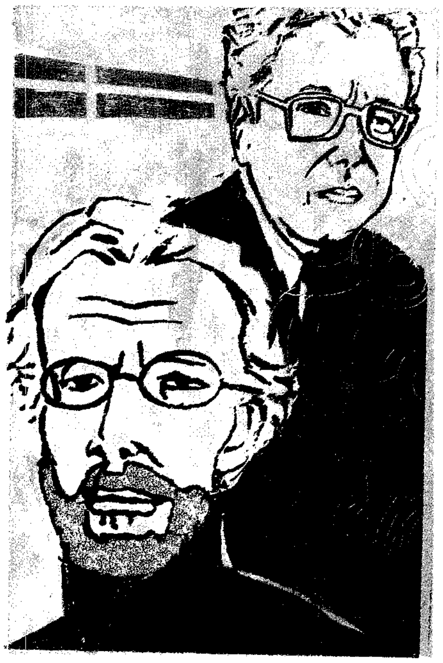
Vienna Philharmonic—Lorin Maazel conducts the ensemble in the opening concerts of Carnegie Hall's season. Sept. 29 at 7: An all-Strauss program, comprising "Also Sprach Zarathustra," "Till Eulenspiegel's Lustige Streiche," and the "Rosenkavalier" Suite. . . . ¶ Sept. 30 at 8: Bruckner's Symphony No. 5. . . . ¶ Oct. 2 at 8: Brahms's Symphony No. 4, Ravel's "Rapsodie Espagnole," and Stravinsky's "Firebird" Suite (in its 1919 version). . . . ¶ Oct. 3 at 2: Mahler's Symphony No. 5. (247-7800.)

String Orchestra of New York City—The conductorless ensemble (which also goes by the acronym SONYC) performs Vivaldi's Concerto in B Minor for Four Violins (Op. 3, No. 10), Aaron Jay Kernis's "Music Celestis," the première of Chris Theofanidis's "Visions and Miracles," and Elgar's "Introduction and Allegro." (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. Sept. 30 at 8.)

Brooklyn Philharmonic—Robert Spano conducts three works that reveal their composers' responses to the Second World War: Bartók's Divertimento for String Orchestra, Strauss's "Metamorphosen," and Shostakovich's Chamber Symphony (Op. 110a, which is Rudolf Barshai's orchestral transcription of the composer's String Quartet No. 8). (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Oct. 1-2 at 8.)

Basically Bach Festival—This annual daylong celebration at St. Peter's Lutheran Church makes extensive use of the venue's mechanical-action Klais organ. Oct. 2 at 1: A recital by the fourteen-year-old whiz-kid German organist Felix Hell includes Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D Minor (BWV 565) and Toccata in F Major, as well as pieces by Pachelbel and Mendelssohn. . . . ¶ At 2: F. Anthony Thurman plays an all-Bach program that includes the "Dorian" Toccata and Fugue and the F-Major Pastorella. . . . ¶ At 3: The English organist Carol Williams, a specialist in the music of Purcell, performs four of that composer's voluntaries, in addition to Bach's G-Major Fantasia and "Fuga Sopra il Magnificat." . . . ¶ At 4: Paul Jacobs, a Curtis student who will be performing the complete organ works of Bach—from memory—in both Philadelphia and New York in 2000, offers two of the Master's preludes and fugues (including the "Wedge"), three chorale preludes, and a trio. . . . ¶ At 5: Walter Hilse plays Bach's Preludes and Fugues in G Major (BWV 541) and D Major (BWV 532), plus all eleven of Brahms's Bach-inspired Chorale Preludes. . . . ¶ At 8: Ralph C. Schultz leads the Saint Peter's Choir, the Bach Festival Orchestra, and four soloists in Bach's Cantatas No. 29 ("Wir Danken Dir, Gott"), No. 80 ("Ein Feste Burg"), and No. 131 ("Aus Der Tiefe"), in addition to the Third Orchestral Suite. (Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 935-2200.)

Manhattan School of Music Philharmonic—Glen Barton Cortese conducts Crumb's "A Haunted Landscape," the first four of Messiaen's "Poèmes pour Mi" (with soprano Amelia Watkins), and Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6. (Borden Auditorium, Manhattan School of Music, Broadway at 122nd St. 749-2802. Oct. 2 at 8.)



DANISH MODERN: *Denmark is sparing no effort in spotlighting its creative artists in New York this season. On October 5, three of its leading composers—Per Nørgård, Karl Aage Rasmussen, and Poul Ruders—will be on hand for an interview preceding one of a series of all-Danish recitals at Merkin Concert Hall. The evening's program features compositions by Rasmussen and Ruders, including the premières of works by both. Rasmussen, fifty-two, is obsessed with the relationship of the present to the past, and his pieces often include quotations or stylistic evocations of older music; his catalogue even includes "re-compositions" of Mahler's Adagietto and the fugue from Beethoven's "Hammerklavier" Sonata (the latter reconstructed for piano, vibraphone, and clarinet). Ruders, two years his junior, also allows the past to creep into his palette, along with everything else; perhaps being an autodidact in composition has helped him steer clear of predictability. In his works, haunting lyricism and minimalism can bump elbows with hot-blooded jazz.*

Juilliard Orchestra—Robert Mann leads Haydn's Symphony No. 86, the première of Richard Wernick's Cello Concerto No. 2 (featuring Joel Krosnick), and Beethoven's Symphony No. 5. (Juilliard Theatre, 155 W. 65th

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St. Oct. 4 at 8. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 769-7406.)

Philadelphia Orchestra—In the first Carnegie Hall concert of its centennial season, the Philadelphia Orchestra performs works that were closely associated with Eugene Ormandy, who served as the group's music director from 1936 to 1980: Ravel's "Valses Nobles et Sentimentales" and "Pavane pour une Infante Défunte," Kodály's "Háry János" Suite, and Bartók's Violin Concerto No. 2 (with Gil Shaham as soloist). (247-7800. Oct. 5 at 8.)

RECITALS

Music from the Copland House—This awkwardly named ensemble, which includes pianist Michael Boriskin, flutist Paul Dunkel, and several colleagues, takes its name from the former Copland residence in Westchester County, which is the group's home base. In this New York début performance, the ensemble jump-starts the Copland centennial with a program of seven chamber works, including the Piano Quartet and the Sextet for Clarinet, Piano, and String Quartet. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. Sept. 29 at 8.)

ARTEK Singers—Gwendolyn Toth leads the five vocalists in a forty-minute lunchtime concert of Monteverdi's "La Sestina," drawn from the composer's "Sixth Book of Madrigals," published in 1614. (St. Francis of Assisi Church, 135 W. 31st St. Sept. 30 at 1:15. No tickets necessary.)

Bargemusic—Maureen McDermott plays Bach's D-Minor Suite for Unaccompanied Cello; colleagues join her for Arensky's String Quartet (Op. 35, oddly arranged for violin, viola, and two cellos) and Dvořák's Piano Quartet in E-Flat Major (Op. 87). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061. Sept. 30 at 7:30 and Oct. 3 at 4.)

My Lord Chamberlain's Consort—The early-music group offers sacred and moralizing lute and consort songs by Dowland, Campion, and other composers from Elizabethan and Jacobean England. (St. Luke In-the-Fields, 487 Hudson St., at Grove St. 633-2167. Sept. 30 at 8.)

Locrian Chamber Players—The ensemble offers four works by Thomas Adès plus a piece by Julian Anderson. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. Oct. 2 at 8.)

Anne-Estelle Meduze—Violinist, with pianist Ilan Rechtman, performing sonatas by Beethoven (in D Major) and Prokofiev (in F Minor). (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., City Island, the Bronx. 718-885-2478. Oct. 3 at noon.)

New Amsterdam Baroque—This newly formed period-instrument chamber group launches its three-concert series in the octagonal drawing room of Morris-Jumel Mansion, the oldest remaining Colonial residence in Manhattan. The program includes works by Telemann and Sweelinck. (65 Jumel Terrace, between 160th and 162nd Sts. 923-8008. Oct. 3 at 2.)

Ariane Lallemand—The French cellist plays Bach's Unaccompanied Suites No. 1, No. 4, and No. 6. (St. Peter's Episcopal Church, 346 W. 20th St. Oct. 3 at 4. Tickets at the door.)

Chloe Owen—The soprano, a professor of singing at Boston University for nearly two decades, has made a specialty of promoting the music of American composers during her long career. Consider the accolade of composer Ned Rorem, who wrote of his "years of admiration for the sound she makes and the intelligence she exudes when singing all songs, especially mine." In this recital, Ms. Owen both celebrates her eighty-first birthday and launches the newly created American Art Song Vocal Competition by performing Carlisle Floyd's "Mystery Cycle," in addition to songs by Strauss, Brahms, and Turina, among others. Pianist Barbara Karp assists. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. Oct. 3 at 5.)

Concerto Italiano—Rinaldo Alessandrini directs madrigals by the late-Renaissance Italian Mannerist composer Luca Marenzio. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. Oct. 4 at 7.)

OCTOBER 4–10. GET-ORGANIZED WEEK
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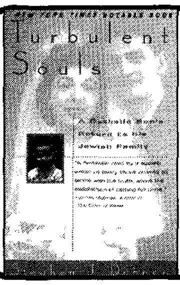

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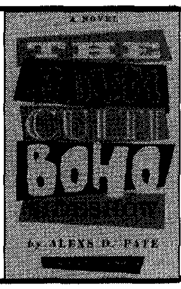

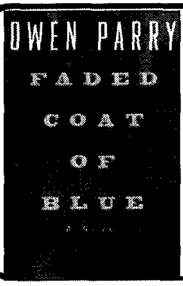

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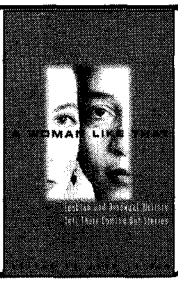

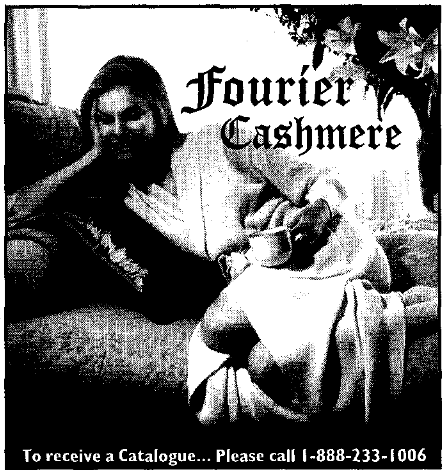
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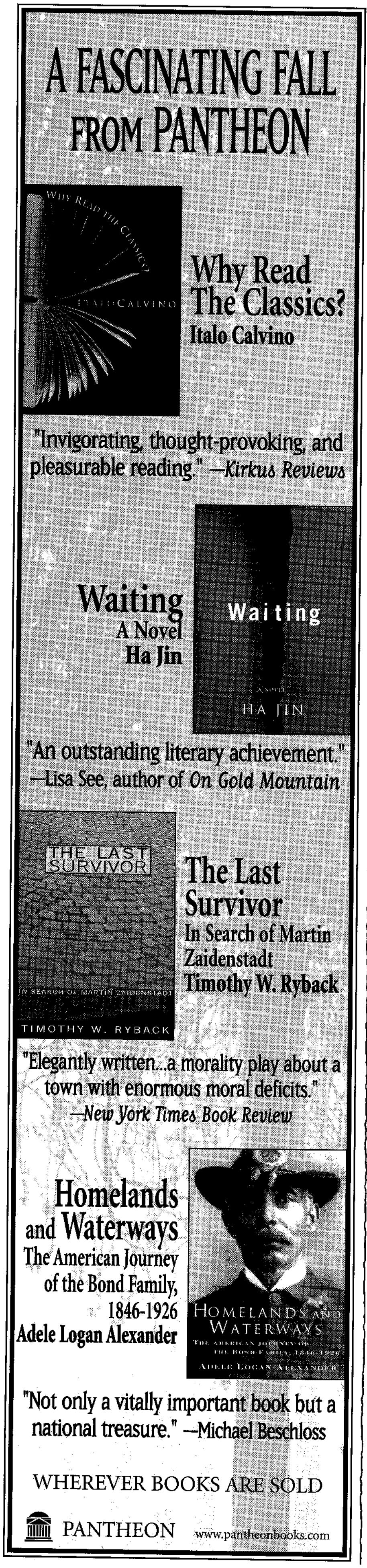

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DANISH WAVE FESTIVAL—The first two of three recitals at Merkin Concert Hall that spotlight the chamber works of notable Danish Composers. Oct. 4 at 8: The distinguished Danish bass Aage Haugland, pianist Paul Rosenbaum, the Miró String Quartet, and the Hexagon chamber ensemble collaborate on a recital that comprises Nielsen's Wind Quintet and a group of his songs, in addition to Rued Langgaard"s "Insektarium," "Humoreske," and String Quartet No. 3. . . . ¶ Oct. 5 at 8: The New York New Music Ensemble, conducted by Jeffrey Milarsky and assisted by French hornist William Purvis, guitarist David Starobin, and violinist Curtis Macomber, offers two works each by Karl Aage Rasmussen (including the première of his Horn Trio) and Poul Ruders (including the première of his "Invisible Mirrors"). (129 W. 67th St. 501-3330.)

"PIANO CENTURY"—The Juilliard School's exploration of twentieth-century piano repertoire continues, as ten student pianists interpret music written between 1912 and 1918, by Scriabin, Satie, Szymanowski, Stravinsky, and others. (Paul Hall, Juilliard School, Lincoln Center Plaza. Oct. 5 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

ALSO OF INTEREST

EDMUNDO RAMÍREZ: Violist, with pianist Grace Nikae, in recital. (Spanish Institute, Park Ave. at 68th St. 628-0420. Sept. 29 at 6:30.) . . . **RUTGERS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA:** Richard Auldon Clark conducts Sibelius's Symphony No. 1. (St. Paul's Chapel, Broadway at Fulton St. Sept. 30 at 1. Admission by contribution.) . . . **PÈLERINAGE DUO:** Husband-and-wife duo-pianists Jerry Wong and Stephanie Shih-yu Cheng, performing works by Schubert, Borodin, and others. (Trinity Church, Broadway at Wall St. Oct. 4 at noon. Admission by contribution.) . . . **"ELYSIUM—BETWEEN TWO CONTINENTS":** Participants in this German summer festival perform lieder and works for vocal ensemble by Schubert, Liszt, and others. (Goethe Institute, 1014 Fifth Ave., at 83rd St. Oct. 5 at 6:30. For information about tickets, call 242-0134.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

READINGS—Sept. 29 at 6: By Jessica Hagedorn, from her novel "Dogeaters." (Library Learning Center, Long Island University, Flatbush Ave. at DeKalb Ave., Brooklyn. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ Sept. 30 at 6:45: By poet Gerard Donovan. (American Irish Historical Society, Fifth Ave. at 80th St. For reservations, which are required, call 288-2263.) . . . ¶ Oct. 5 at 8: By poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Edward Sanders, founder of the folk-rock group the Fugs. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. Tickets at the door.)

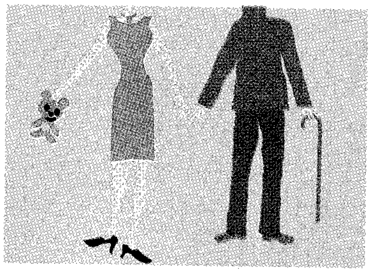
TALKS—Sept. 29 at 6: Writer John Yau interviews poet Robert Creeley. (Celeste Bartos Forum, New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. For information about tickets, call 930-0571.) . . . ¶ Sept. 29 at 7: New York *Times* science editor Cornelia Dean talks about her new book, "Against the Tide: The Battle for America's Beaches." (American Museum of Natural History, Central Park W. at 79th St. 769-5100.) . . . ¶ Sept. 30 at 5:30: Tour guide Joyce Mendelsohn, historian Randolph Petsche, and editor Jack Taylor discuss the Ladies' Mile, the late-nineteenth-century shopping district along Sixth Avenue from 9th St. to 23rd St. (Andrew Haiskell Library for the Blind, 40 W. 20th St. No tickets necessary.)

TOUR—Oct. 2 at 11, 12:30, 2, 3:30, and 5: Brooklyn resident Bob Diamond explores the half-mile Atlantic Avenue Tunnel, which was dug in 1844 by the Long Island Rail Road, sealed in 1861, and rediscovered eighteen years ago by Diamond. For more information, call 718-875-8993.

BOOK CURRENTS

Mr. Robinson

THE dynamics of the May–December romance have long been a staple of impassioned prose—from Nabokov's "Lolita" to Mia Farrow's "What Falls Away." In Lily King's lyrical début novel, **THE PLEASING HOUR** (Atlantic Monthly), she weighs in on the subject with the story of Rosie, a plain American au pair in Paris. Rosie is held at arm's length by Nicole, the beautiful, austere mother of her charges, at the same time that she finds herself falling in love with Marc, the older woman's husband. In an imaginative twist, King shows how the attraction between Rosie and Marc brings the two women closer together.

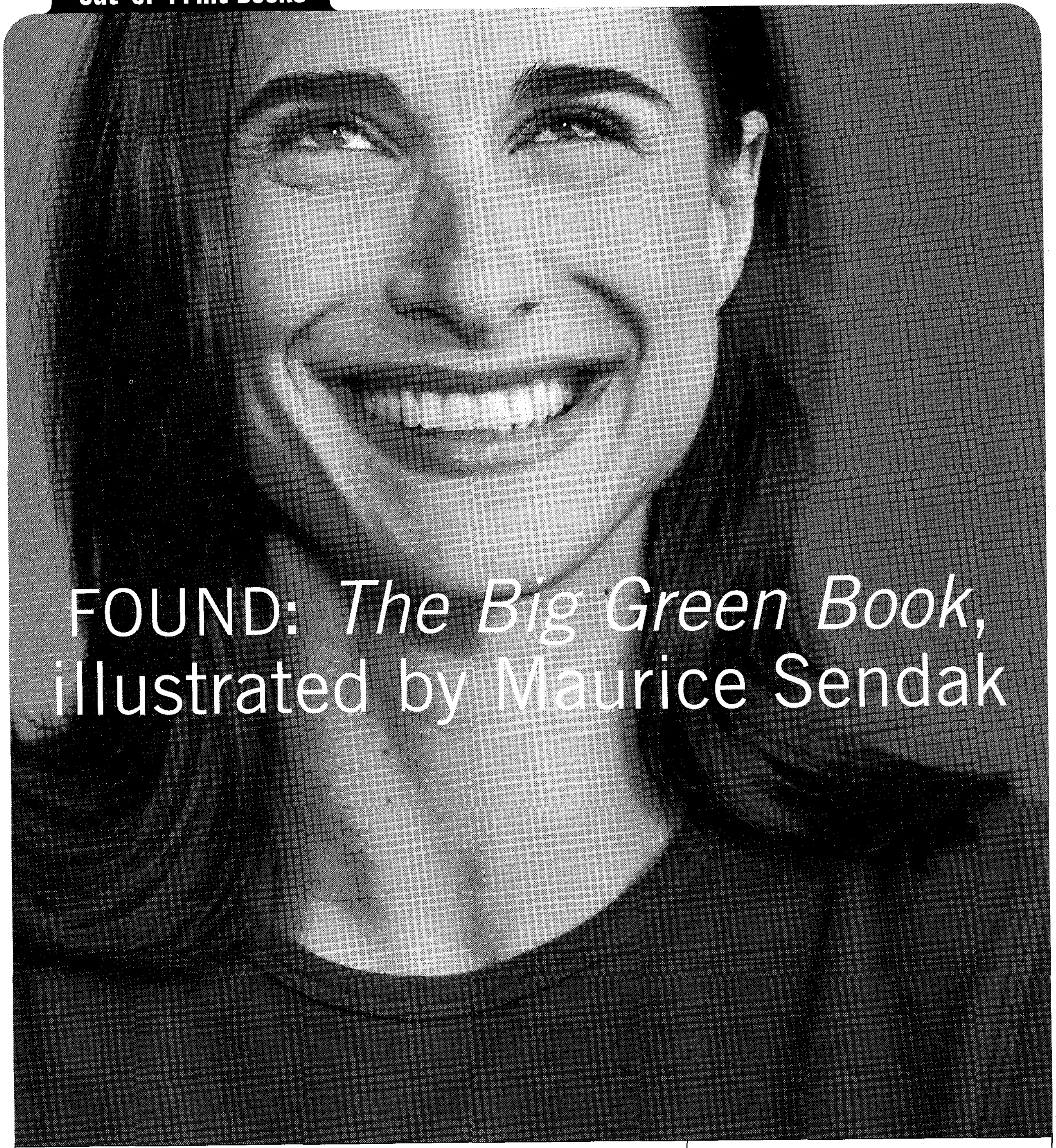


KIM DE MARCO

Mutual understanding, however, is rarely the end result of infidelity. In the title story of Daniel Mueller's first collection, **HOW ANIMALS MATE** (Overlook), a sixteen-year-old boy named Rich watches in horror as Tammy, a classmate he has fantasized about, comes on to his father in an operating room by asking him questions about his work—gynecology. In "A Baffling Choice," a story in Ivan Klíma's collection **LOVERS FOR A DAY** (Grove), a young Czech mother has an affair with an elderly bookbinder. When she tells her husband that she can't live with him anymore, he is astounded: "When he had grasped the sordid nature of her infidelity, he yelled at her that she disgusted him. He was about to hit her but it seemed too theatrical and undignified, so he just spat on the floor and dashed out of the room."

In David Huddle's novel **THE STORY OF A MILLION YEARS** (Houghton Mifflin), the central infidelity is kept a secret. Fifteen-year-old Marcy has an affair with a forty-one-year-old friend of her parents, but ends the liaison in favor of Allen, a high-school jock her own age. Twenty-five years of marriage and two children later, Allen still believes Marcy's little high-school lie: "I was astonished to learn that that's what can happen to a girl who exerts herself at an extreme level—she can literally lose her virginity by running the hundred-yard dash."

Out-of-Print Books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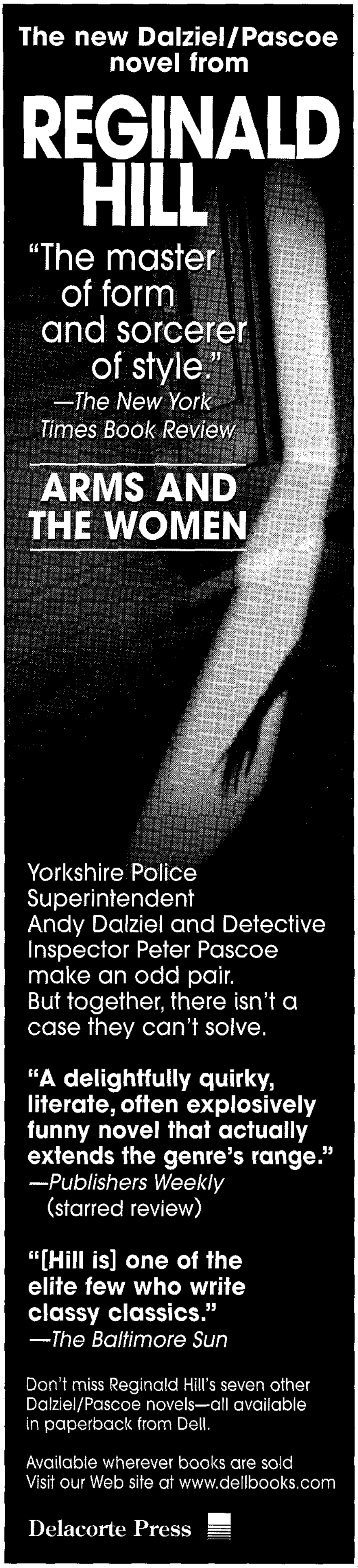

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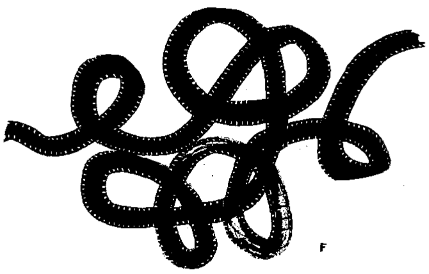
THE MOVIES



OPENING

The Adventures of Elmo in Grouchland—The Sesame Street character in pursuit of his beloved blanket. Directed by Gary Halvorson. Opening Oct. 1.

Drive Me Crazy—A teen-age romantic comedy, with Melissa Joan Hart and Adrian Grenier. Directed by John Schultz. Opening Oct. 1. (Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 64th and 2nd, 62nd & Broadway, and Village East Cinemas.)

Happy, Texas—A comedy about escaped prisoners and a small-town beauty contest. With Jeremy Northam, Steve Zahn, and William H. Macy; directed by Mark Illsley. Opening Oct. 1. (Cinema I, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

Love Reinvented—Twelve short gay and lesbian films. Most in French. Opening Oct. 1. (Quad Cinema.)

Mystery, Alaska—A group of small-town hockey players challenge the New York Rangers to a game. With Russell Crowe and Hank Azaria, directed by Jay Roach. Opening Oct. 1.

New Rose Hotel—A science-fiction film, based on the short story by William Gibson. Directed by Abel Ferrara; with Christopher Walken, Willem Dafoe, and Asia Argento. Opening Oct. 1. (Cinema Village.)

Plunkett & Macleane—Jake Scott's tale of two mid-eighteenth-century English highwaymen (Robert Carlyle and Jonny Lee Miller). Opening Oct. 1.

Three Kings—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Oct. 1.

Uncommon Friends of the 20th Century—A documentary about Jim and Ellie Newton, friends of such twentieth-century figures as Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, and Charles Lindbergh. Directed by John Biffar. Opening Oct. 1. (Cinema Village.)

FILM NOTES

(If a movie has been reviewed recently in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given.)

American Beauty—This amazing and impassioned fantasia about American loneliness begins as satire and ends with a vision of the sublime. The defeated suburban patriarch Lester Burnham (Kevin Spacey), condemned by his withdrawn daughter (Thora Birch) and his hyperorganized wife (Annette Bening), drops out of his job and misbehaves badly. After Lester's marriage gets blown apart by squalls of comic contempt, the movie, which was written by Alan Ball and directed by the British theatre maestro Sam Mendes (it's his first film), opens up and takes in Lester's suburban territory—the dissatisfactions of the business-mad nineties, in which the gospel of selfishness leaves people clenched and isolated. The bitter satirical riffs slowly give way to a mystical appreciation of the vagrant beauty trapped beneath the surface of life. The hard-edged, almost hyperreal cinematography, by Conrad L. Hall, and the editing, by Tariq Anwar and Chris Greenbury, shift back and forth between dream and actuality with mesmerizing beauty. With Mena Suvari as a teen vamp who is terrified of being ordinary, and Wes Bentley as a young drug dealer who uses his video camera to discover the hidden connections among things.—*David Denby* (9/20/99) (Beekman, Kips Bay Theatres, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, State, and Village Theatre VII.)

Aparajito (1957)—The central film of Satyajit Ray's great Apu Trilogy is transitional in structure, rather than dramatic, but it's full of insights and revelations. Ray takes the broken family of "Pather Panchali" from its medieval village life to the modern streets of Benares and follows the boy Apu in his encounter with the school system, and later, when he has left his mother, with the intellectual life at the University of Calcutta. There is a luminous moment when Apu recites a poem in a classroom—you understand how it is that art survives in the midst of poverty. In Bengali.—*Pauline Kael* (BAM Rose Cinemas; Sept. 29.)

Black Cat, White Cat—"I don't give a shit about death!" exclaims an old man as he rides in an open car along the Serbian Danube, accompanied by his grandson and a big, lively band of musicians. The man has just been liberated from a hospital, and his vulgar ebullience reflects director Emir Kusturica's own insistently sunny mood. The story centers around a small-time con man whose get-rich-quick schemes involve him with a coked-up, disco-dancing gangster and the aging local Mafia don. But this is a Rube Goldberg type of Gypsy Mafia, complete with train robberies (the entire train, not just the stuff in it), escapes from arranged marriages, and corpses kept in an attic under precariously balanced slabs of ice. The film's two and a quarter hours of unrelenting zaniness are more exhausting than uplifting. In Serbo-Croatian and Romany.—*Ken Marks* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Blithe Spirit (1945)—Noël Coward wrote this flippant, ectoplasmic comedy in 1941 to provide some relief for war-torn London; it seemed pleasantly airy in stage productions at the time, but it sags more than a little in this arch David Lean version. You're terribly aware that you're listening to repartee. Rex Harrison plays the English novelist who, in order to gather material for a story, jestingly arranges for a medium to conduct a séance. Inadvertently, he conjures up the ghost of his pouty, blond first wife (the husky-voiced Kay Hammond), and she ensconces herself in the home he now shares with his second wife (Constance Cummings), and flits about, making salacious comments. The novelist finds himself in an involuntary state of "astral bigamy." Margaret Rutherford provides some desperately needed gusto. She plays Madame Arcati, the brisk, exuberant medium, who wears long woollen scarves, moves with a skating motion, and whoops clichés ("Let's make it a real rouser!") like a football coach—*P.K.* (Museum of Modern Art; Oct. 1 and Oct. 5.)

Earth—India's tumultuous partition, in 1947, is recalled by a Parsi woman who was eight at the time and living in Lahore. The story centers on the girl's excursions about the city with her nanny, a beautiful young Hindu woman (Nandita Das) with a diverse group of friends which includes Sikhs and Muslims; they make where they can an idyll of their unprivileged lives. History intrudes on them, as history will, but in this sumptuous, disturbing film, director Deepa Mehta handles her material convincingly, and the cast is so likable that they wear the Larger Themes like beautiful garments. "Earth" has an urgency and a narrative economy like "Casablanca"'s; A. R. Rahman's hypnotic score and Giles Nuttgens's passionate cinematography contribute significantly to this effect.—*Jeff Gustavson* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

For Love of the Game—The Detroit Tigers pitcher Billy Chapel (Kevin Costner), a forty-year-old right-hander with a sore shoulder, works on a perfect game against the Yankees, and, as he pitches, innings of his relationship with a magazine writer and single mother (Kelly Preston), pass through his mind. Billy is a combination of stoic warrior and Hemingway's old man in the sea, fighting the great fish. And yet the movie is not all idealization: Billy can be cold and self-involved, and "For Love of the Game" asks whether the same qualities that make an athlete a champion don't also destroy his happiness. The answer, unfortunately, is long-winded and redundant, and the iron-larynxed baseball announcer Vin Scully, who narrates the game, turns everything into a cliché. But some of the baseball scenes are good. With John C. Reilly as Billy's tender-hearted catcher. Written by Dana Stevens, who adapted Michael Shaara's novel, and directed by Sam Raimi, who shows an unexpected flair for popular romance.—*D.D.* (9/27/99) (Criterion Center, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Olympia, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and Village Theatre VII.)

Guinevere—Romantic and shrewdly realistic at the same time. A smart San Francisco girl, Harper (Sarah Polley), escapes an unhappy family of lawyers and a career at Harvard Law School and takes up instead with Connie (Stephen Rea), a bohemian Mission District photographer who tells her that she's an artist. The photographer is a con man and a practiced seducer of young women, but he delivers the goods—not just sex but the attention that a young woman needs. Stephen Rea doesn't mask Connie's decrepitude, but he colors it with a lilting voice and a sad-eyed charm, and the young Canadian actress Sarah Pol-

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THEATRE ADDRESSES

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(For show times, call 777-FILM, except where noted.)

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770).
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Criterion Center, Broadway at 44th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
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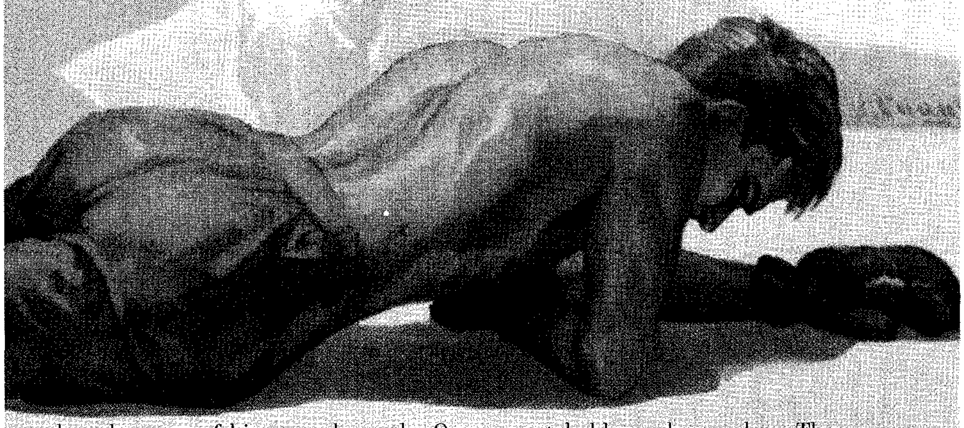
Any and all descriptions implying greatness can be applied to the man born Walker Smith in Detroit on May 3, 1921, but the one appellation that stuck was first uttered by writer Jack Case, who, while witnessing for the first time a young lanky boxer fighting for the Salem Crescent gym in New York, remarked to the manager of the team, George Gainford, "That's a sweet fighter you've got there." "Sweet as sugar," replied Gainford for posterity. And so it was that "Sugar" Ray Robinson was born. Robinson came by the other part of his name honestly. Or somewhat honestly. For back in those days when the bootleg circuit—unlicensed fights held in small clubs—held sway, the youngster originally went by his given name, Walker Smith, "Smitty" to his friends. One night "Smitty" borrowed the amateur card of a friend named Ray Robinson and became, from that night on, the man who would go on as Ray Robinson to become "The Greatest Fighter, Pound-for-Pound, in the History of Boxing."

No single label for Robinson is adequate. He was boxing's version of Rashomon; everyone saw something different: He could deliver a knockout blow going backward; he was seamless, with no fault lines; his left hand, held always at the ready, was purity in motion; his footwork was superior to any that had been seen in boxing up to that time; his hand speed and leverage were unmatchable; and on and on. There was an unaltered chemistry to Ray Robinson. He was magic; he was Hemingway's "Grace under pressure."



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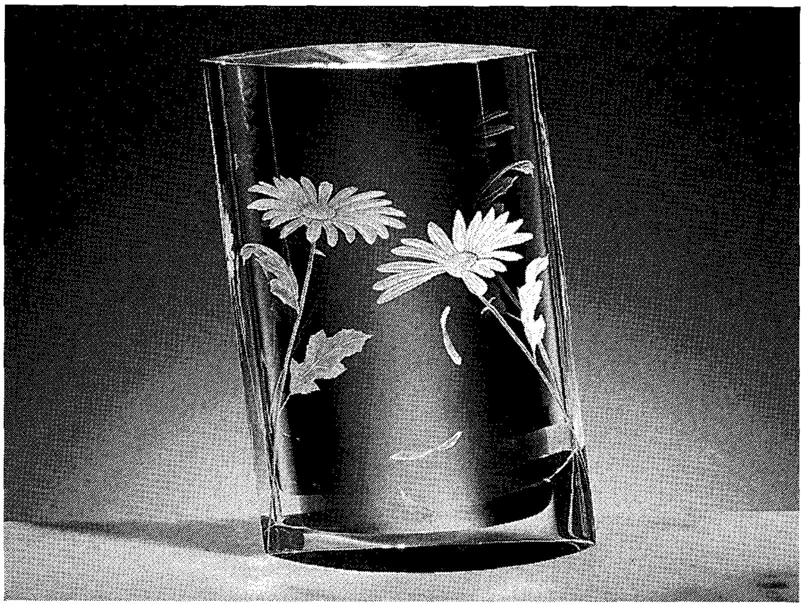

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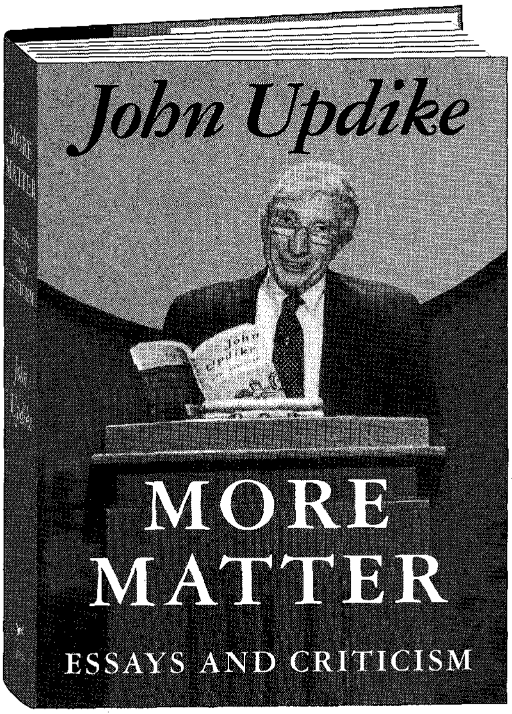

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ley is a proud, delicate performer—a potential star. Written and directed with warmth and perception by Audrey Wells.—*D.D.* (9/27/99) (Angelika Film Center, Gotham Cinema, and Lincoln Square.)

Lady Windermere's Fan (1925)—Ernst Lubitsch deftly reshapes Oscar Wilde's play so that it's part Wilde and part "Stella Dallas." Unlike the playwright, Lubitsch reveals almost immediately that Mrs. Erlynne (Irene Rich), the mysterious beauty with strange designs on Lord Windermere (Bert Lytell), is the long-suffering, scandal-scarred mother of Lady Windermere (May McAvoy). The result is a suave, seriocomic soaper. Ronald Colman is terrific as Lord Darlington: of course he's debonair, yet he's also surprisingly fervent in his feeling for Lady Windermere. But the triumph belongs to Lubitsch, who mingles satirical elegance and melodramatic gusto. Silent.—*Michael Sragow* (Anthology Film Archives; Oct. 1.)

The Minus Man—When Vann (Owen Wilson) steps into the sunshine or gets caught in a cop's high beams, his blond hair, fair skin, light clothes, and blank features render him practically transparent. Vann is surely the gentlest, most unassuming serial killer ever put on-screen. Director Hampton Francher gives his picture a washed-out, low-contrast look, and the effect is more reflective and dreamlike than scary and creepy. Francher also wrote the engaging screenplay (based on a novel by Lew McCreary), which works as a meditation on randomness and causality. Wilson is perfect as the polite, compulsive poisoner who tries to settle into a small California town but knows that it'll never work out. The excellent cast includes Brian Cox, Mercedes Ruehl, and Janeane Garofalo.—*K.M.* (Angelika Film Center and 59th Street East Cinema.)

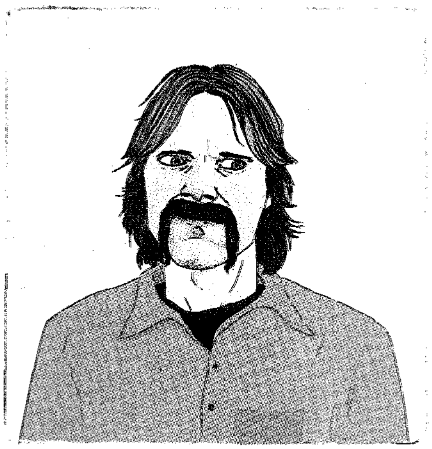
Mumford—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema I, East 86th Street Street Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, State, and Union Square.)

No Way Out (1950)—Sidney Poitier made his début in the role of a doctor whose clash with a racist psychopath (Richard Widmark) sparks an urban conflagration. He was only twenty-two, though he told the director, Joseph L. Mankiewicz, that he was twenty-seven so he'd seem old enough to be an intern. His confidence as a performer is astounding, especially since he's surrounded by movie veterans like Widmark and Linda Darnell, and experienced stage actors like Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis. Some audiences hiss when they see the doctor try to save the psycho's life. Yet Poitier conveys the anger beneath the civil surface: his last line to Widmark—"Don't cry, white boy, you're gonna live"—registers as a curse.—*M.S.* (Anthology Film Archives; Sept. 30.)

Outside Providence—This comedy embraces all the clichés that "Rushmore" so niftily exploded. It's 1974, and the sweet but troubled, wrong-side-of-the-tracks Tim Dunphy (Shawn Hatosy) gets busted and sent to prep school, where he romances the upper-crusty but tolerant coed Jane Weston (Amy Smart), battles the evil dorm master, befriends a picked-on nerd, and learns a lot about life, love, and responsibility. There's also the obligatory face-off with his gruff, disappointed dad—Alec Baldwin, who uses an accent that careens between Rhode Island and Ralph Kramden. Written by Peter and Bobby Farrelly and Michael Corrente, who also directed.—*K.M.* (East 86th Street Cinemas, Sutton, and Village East Cinemas.)

Romance—The great advantage of growing up French is that you can be absurd without ever knowing it. In Catherine Breillat's sexually explicit drama, Marie (Caroline Ducey), a dark teardrop of a girl who is spurned by her live-in boyfriend, drags herself without apparent pleasure through one sordid sex situation after another while intoning such thoughts to herself as "I like it to be anonymous. It's my purity—more metaphysical." Only in a French movie would a woman embrace sexual experimentation merely to attain an enormous *pensée*. Marie finds happiness with her boss, a proudly ugly, middle-aged schoolmaster, who ties her up. "Why do men who disgust us appeal to us more than men who respect us?" she asks. Abrupt but static, pornographic but unarousing, and emotionally muffled throughout, the movie feels like a third-rate Left Bank novel from fifty years ago. In French.—*D.D.* (9/27/99) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Eastside Playhouse, and Quad Cinema.)

The Shop Around the Corner (1940)—Close to perfection—one of the most beautifully acted and paced romantic comedies ever made in this country. It is set in the enclosed world of the people who work together in a small department store; Margaret Sullavan and James Stewart are the employees who bicker with each other, and in no other movie has this kind of love-hate been made so convincing. Their performances are full of grace notes; when you watch later James Stewart films, you may wonder what became of this other deft, sensitive, pre-drawling Stewart. As for Sullavan, this is a peerless performance: she makes the shopgirl's pretenses believable, lyrical, and funny. Though it's all set in a Hollywood Budapest, the director, Ernst Lubitsch, sustains a faintly European tone.—*P.K.* (Anthology Film Archives; Oct. 2-3.)



LARA TOMLIN

DIM WIT: *He's been seen around the edges of some hit Hollywood movies—as a bookseller in "You've Got Mail" and Ben Affleck's best friend in "Forces of Nature"—and he's done some buoyant ensemble work in such independent films as "Suburbia" and "Reality Bites," but Steve Zahn's most memorable role came last year in Steven Soderbergh's "Out of Sight." As Glenn, the clueless stoner who gets in too deep with a crime gang, Zahn showed a wacky vulnerability. In most of his films, Zahn uses his warm, blue-eyed stare and hesitant, druggy delivery (his voice has a slurry quality that's instantly recognizable) to mask the keen survival instinct within his endearing losers. He won this year's Sundance Award for best acting, in "Happy, Texas" (out this week); the movie's plot—about two escaped convicts who are forced to pose as beauty-pageant experts—provides Zahn with his richest comic material yet.*

Stir of Echoes—The obvious "Sixth Sense" parallel aside—another kid with the power to communicate with the dead—director David Koepp's adaptation of Richard Matheson's novel borrows elements of "The Exorcist," "Close Encounters," "Poltergeist," and "Wait Until Dark," but the result is a pretty dull mess. Kevin Bacon stars as Tom (the kid's father), a working-class Chicago guy who never wanted to be famous, just not so ordinary. Welcome to extra-ordinary, pal. A doubter, he dares his sister-in-law Lisa (Illeana Douglas, in a smart-ass mode that wears thin) to hypnotize him, and—bang!—special-effects doors open up that give Tom the sight his son already possesses. The ensuing ghost story is short on dread, and the murder mystery unfolds without much suspense.—*K.M.* (Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, State, and Union Square.)

Sugar Town—An L.A. satire that's not nearly sharp enough or mean enough for its own good. Allison Anders and Kurt Voss, who co-wrote and co-directed, introduce us to a group of friends and acquaintances on the fringes of the movie and music businesses. Everybody's dissatisfied. The rock guys, who were big in the eighties, are now having trouble getting arrested. The actress (Rosanna Arquette), a former horror-film ingénue, balks at having to play her age. The production designer (Ally Sheedy) will try every New Age technique in the Yellow Pages to cure her loneliness. And, of course, the clerk in the health-food store keeps his head shots on hand just in case his ticket to stardom stops in for wheat berries. It's all pretty familiar material by now (Robert Altman's nailed this milieu at least twice), and it's not helped by the marshmallowy consistency of nearly every scene.—*K.M.* (First & 62nd Cinemas and Union Square.)

West Beirut—The best début movies have a quality all their own—a kind of breathless, jolting ebullience, suggesting that young filmmakers would burst if they didn't get to tell their stories. The Lebanese director Ziad Doueiri is one such enthusiast; his movie has its rough patches and, toward the end, its slightly damp longueurs, but it nails a time and a place so firmly that, when it ends, you feel bereft. Based largely on Doueiri's own teen-age years, it stars his brother Rami as Tarek, a Beirut schoolboy with a sly smile. Tarek lives with his parents, Hala (Carmen Lebbos) and Riad (Joseph Bou Nassar), in the Muslim area of East Beirut; the tale begins in April, 1975, when sectarian rivalries split the city in two. Suddenly, Tarek and his friend Omar (Mohamad Chamas) are unable to attend school in the Eastern sector; the simple act of getting film developed involves a mortal risk. There are extraordinary scenes here, as moments of light comedy flip casually into the treacherous, and vice versa; if you want solid political history, the film is no more than an infuriating sketch, but as an exercise in the unpredictable it shows both nerve and charm. In Arabic.—*A.L.* (9/6/99) (BAM Rose Cinemas and Village East Cinemas.)

Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown (1988)—The artificial is what sends Pedro Almodóvar sky-high, and the Madrid of this film is (as the closing song has it) "Puro Teatro." The comedy is all coincidences, and each new one adds to the crazy brio. What seem to be incidental jokes turn out to be essential parts of one big joke. This is a movie where after a while you can't tell sexy from funny. Pepa (Carmen Maura), an actress who works in TV and commercials, turns on her answering machine and learns that she has been jilted. Infuriated, she

From the horse's mouth

A COMPLETELY UNSOLICITED testimonial appeared recently in A La Carte, the definitive mouthpiece of food and wine.

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dashes around, on spike heels, in a short tight skirt, trying to confront her longtime live-in lover, the elegant, vain Iván (Fernando Guillén). The women of the title include Iván's early lover (Julieta Serrano), his new lover (Kiti Manver), and two (Rossy De Palma and María Barranco) who are involved with his son (Antonio Banderas). Sleek-legged and chic, they run the theatrical gamut. In Spanish.—*P.K.* (American Museum of the Moving Image; Oct. 2.)

The World of Apu (1959)—Satyajit Ray's protagonist, Apu, whose consciousness developed from the village life of "Pather Panchali" and the university in "Aparajito," marries the exquisite Sharmila Tagore and grows beyond self-consciousness. Rich and contemplative, and a great, convincing affirmation. The full-grown Apu is played by the remarkable Soumitra Chatterji, who starred in several other Ray films. In Bengali.—*P.K.* (BAM Rose Cinemas; Sept. 30.)

ALSO PLAYING

THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT (reviewed in our issue of 7/26/99): Chelsea Cinemas and Village East Cinemas. . . . **BLUE STREAK:** Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Cinema, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, and Village Theatre VII. . . . **BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS:** Angelika Film Center, Cinema 3rd Avenue, and Lincoln Square. . . . **BUENA VISTA SOCIAL CLUB:** Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **THE DINNER GAME:** Paris. . . . **DOG PARK:** Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, Orpheum VII, Sutton, and Village East Cinemas. . . . **DOUBLE JEOPARDY:** Astor Plaza, Coronet Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Kips Bay Theatre, 19th Street East 6, Olympia, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII. . . . **GET BRUCE!:** Chelsea Cinemas. . . . **JAKOB THE LIAR:** Chelsea West, East 85th Street Cinema, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, Union Square, and Ziegfeld. . . . **RUN LOLA RUN:** Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **THE SIXTH SENSE** (8/23-30/99): Cinema II, Criterion Center, East 86th Street Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, and Village East Cinemas. . . . **STAR WARS: EPISODE I—THE PHANTOM MENACE** (5/24/99): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **STIGMATA:** Chelsea West, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Cinema, Orpheum VII, State, Union Square, and Waverly. . . . **THE THOMAS CROWN AFFAIR** (8/9/99): Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and Union Square.

At Anthology Film Archives, Ernst Lubitsch's "The Merry Widow."

PHOTOFEST

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

(Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.)

New York Film Festival—The annual festival of international films. Sept. 29 at 6: "Beau Travail" (Claire Denis; France). . . . Sept. 29 at 9 and Sept. 30 at 6: "Julien Donkey-Boy" (Harmony Korine; United States). . . . Sept. 30 at 8:30 and Oct. 2 at 11:15 A.M.: "Time Regained" (Raul Ruiz; France). . . . Oct. 1 at 6 and Oct. 2 at midnight: "Boys Don't Cry" (Kimberly Pierce; United States). . . . Oct. 1 at 9 and Oct. 2 at 3: "Being John Malkovich" (Spike Jonze; United States). . . . Oct. 2 at 6 and Oct. 3 at 1:30: "Topsy-Turvy" (Mike Leigh; United Kingdom). . . . Oct. 2 at 9:30: "Juha" (Aki Kaurismaki; Finland). . . . Oct. 3 at 5:30: "Pripyat" (Nikolaus Geyrhalter; Austria). . . . Oct. 3 at 8:30 and Oct. 4 at 9: "Rosetta" (Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne; Belgium). . . . Oct. 4 at 6 and Oct. 5 at 9:15: "Dogma" (Kevin Smith; United States). . . . Oct. 5 at 6: "Pola X" (Leos Carax; France). (Alice Tully Hall. For tickets, call 875-5050.)

Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Closed for renovations until Oct. 13.

Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—A program of films representing all elements of the life of Noël Coward—writing, acting, directing. Sept. 30 at 2:30 and Oct. 2 at 12:15: "Hearts of the World" (1918, D. W. Griffith; silent), with Coward. . . . Sept. 30 at 6 and Oct. 3 at 1: "The Scoundrel" (1935, Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur), with Coward. . . . Oct. 1 and Oct. 5 at 2:30: "Blithe Spirit" (†). . . . Oct. 1 at 6 and Oct. 3 at 5: "Present Laughter" (1967, Gordon Flemying), play and music by Coward. . . . Oct. 1 at 8:30 and Oct. 2 at 5: "The Astonished Heart" (1950, Terence Fisher and Anthony Darnborough), screenplay and music by Coward. . . . Oct. 2 at 3:15: "Easy Virtue" (1927, Alfred Hitchcock; silent), play by Coward. . . . Oct. 3 at 3 and Oct. 4 at 6: "Our Man in Havana" (1959, Carol Reed), with Coward. . . . Oct. 4 at 2:30: "Cavalcade" (1933, Frank Lloyd), play by Coward. . . . Oct. 5 at 6: "Brief Encounter" (1945, David Lean), screenplay by Coward. . . . ¶ Sept. 30 at 6: A program of more than a hundred 1998 award-winning British television and cinema commercials. . . . ¶ Oct. 1 at 6 and 8:15; Oct. 2 at 2, 3:30, and 5:30; Oct. 3 at 2, 3:30, and 5; Oct. 4 at 6; and Oct. 5 at 2: Nine different programs of films and videos by Brazilian director Arthur Omar.

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600)—A program of films directed by Pietro Germi; in Italian, with English subtitles. Sept. 29 at 4 and 8:30: "Four Ways Out" (1951). . . . Sept. 29 at 6:15 and Oct. 1 at 4 and 8:30: "The Railroad Man" (1956). . . . Sept. 30 at 4 and 8:30: "The Brigand of Tacca di Lupo" (1952). . . . Sept. 30 at 6:15: "The Straw Man" (1958). . . . Oct. 1 at 6:15 and Oct. 2 at 1 and 6: "The Facts of Murder" (1959). . . . Oct. 2 at 3:30 and 8:30: "Divorce Italian Style" (1961). . . . Oct. 4 at 4 and 9 and Oct. 5 at 6:30: "Seduced and Abandoned" (1963). . . . Oct. 4 at 6:30 and Oct. 5 at 4 and 9: "The Birds, the Bees and the Italians" (1965). . . . ¶ Oct. 3 at 11:30 A.M. and 6: "Underground" (1997, Emir Kusturica), a five-hour-and-twelve-minute video, shown with an intermission.

BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770)—Sept. 29: "Aparajito" (†). . . . Sept. 30: "The World of Apu" (†). . . . Oct. 1: "Bitter Sweet" (1940, W. S. Van Dyke). . . . Oct. 2: "The Scoundrel" (1935, Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur). . . . Oct. 3: "Delicatessen" (1991, Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Marc Caro; in French). . . . Oct. 4: "Frank Capra's American Dream" (1997, Kenneth Bowser), a documentary. . . . Oct. 5: "Moby Dick" (1930, Lloyd Bacon).

American Museum of the Moving Image, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—A program of films directed by Pedro Almodóvar; in Spanish, with English subtitles. Oct. 2 at 2: "Pepi, Luci, Bom" (1980). . . . Oct. 2 at 4: "Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown" (†). . . . Oct. 3 at 2: "What Have I Done to Deserve This?" (1984). . . . Oct. 3 at 4: "High Heels" (1991).

A Different Light Bookstore, 151 W. 19th St. (989-4850)—A Sunday-night series of free films (and popcorn). On Oct. 3 at 7, the feature will be "Santo vs. the Vampire Women" (1961, K. Gordon Murray).

Museum of Television and Radio, 25 W. 52nd St. (621-6800)—A program of television shows featuring Noël Coward works. Through Sept. 30: "Ford Star Jubilee: Blithe Spirit" (1956, Coward), with Coward, Lauren Bacall, and Claudette Colbert. . . . From Oct. 1: "Producers' Showcase: Tonight at 8:30," three Coward plays, directed by Otto Preminger, with Ginger Rogers. (Tuesdays through Sundays at 2:30.) . . ¶ Through Oct. 3: Parts I and II of Dennis Potter's "Pennies from Heaven" (1978), with Bob Hoskins. . . . From Oct. 5: Parts III and IV of "Pennies from Heaven." (Tuesdays through Sundays at 1:30.)

Metropolitan Museum of Art, Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (570-3949)—A program of films featuring Egypt. Sept. 29 at 6: "Professor Beware" (1938, Elliott Nugent). . . . Sept. 29 at 8: "The Egyptian" (1954, Micahel Curtiz). . . . Sept. 30 at 6: "Cairo" (1963, Wolf Rilla). . . . Sept. 30 at 8: "The Four Feathers" (1939, Zoltán Korda). . . . Oct. 1 at 6: "Night of Counting the Years" (1969, Shadi Abdelsalam). . . . Oct. 1 at 8: "The English Patient" (1996, Anthony Minghella).

Anthology Film Archives, 32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—Sept. 30 at 6:30: "No Way Out" (†). . . . Oct. 1 at 7 and Oct. 3 at 8: "Cluny Brown" (1946, Ernst Lubitsch). . . . Oct. 1 at 9: "Lady Windermere's Fan" (†). . . . Oct. 2 at 7 and Oct. 3 at 4: "The Shop Around the Corner" (†). . . . Oct. 2 at 9 and Oct. 3 at 6: "The Merry Widow" (1934, Lubitsch).

Miller Theatre, Broadway at 116th St. (854-7799)—A series of films directed by Elia Kazan. Oct. 4 at 6: "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" (1945). . . . Oct. 4 at 8:30: "On the Waterfront" (1954).

The 1999 Chinese Film Festival—Six new films, all in Chinese, with English subtitles. Oct. 5 and Oct. 8-9 at the Lila Acheson Wallace Auditorium, Asia Society, 725 Park Ave., at 70th St. and Oct. 6-7 at the Tinker Auditorium, French Institute Alliance Française, 22 E. 60th St. (For information, call 888-906-FILM.)

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THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT

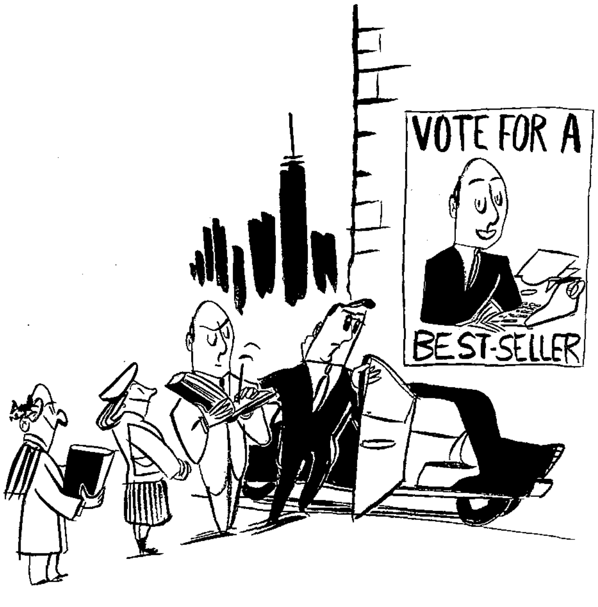
The novel approach to government.

WHO runs London? If you rely on the movies for your image of British life, you would probably say that the place was ruled by the Queen, or by a sharp-suited crew of hard men from the East End with flattened noses and eyes that tell no lies. If you have visited the city recently and enjoyed the traditional custom of standing in a motionless, superheated subway carriage with someone else's suitcase on your foot, you will have realized the awful truth: *Nobody* runs London. Now all this is to change. London has decided to get a makeover—physical, administrative, even moral. In short, it wants a mayor.

The city already has a Lord Mayor, but that is a ceremonial role; it demands great strength from its holders, who in pursuit of their duties are bowed down by more gold chain than Dennis Rodman, but it carries no clout. The new mayor, on the other hand, will be a doer—a roller-up of shirtsleeves, a force in the land. The front-runners are an eclectic bunch: Jeffrey Archer, the potboiling novelist and multimillionaire; Ken Livingstone, a cheerfully unreconstructed Socialist who is known to keep newts; Glenda Jackson, the breast-baring star of "Women in Love" and Member of Parliament for Hampstead, in North London; and Steven Norris, a former Conservative Minister whose main achievement was to run five mistresses while in office—a record that argues, if nothing else, a firm grasp of logistics.

The man to watch, of course, is Jeffrey Archer. He has the backing of Lady Thatcher, but the rest of the Tory Party is wary of bestowing its benediction. One cause of disquiet is Archer's past, which seems to change shape like a wraith. According to Michael Crick, his biographer, Archer went to Oxford on the strength of exams that he had never passed; in 1966, headhunters were impressed to learn of his degree in anatomy, physiology, and psychology from Berkeley—a university he had never attended. More recently, the Department of Trade and Industry investigated him on charges of insider trading. There was insufficient evidence for a court case, but the fishiness of the episode remains pungent. Would you trust this man with your town?

We are used to the unsavory sight of politicians abusing their retirement by producing memoirs that nobody outside the Beltway will read, and to eminent figures—often Republicans of granite morality—who like to relax by composing novels of surprising erotic precision. ("She rolled on him, bounced on him, writhed under him, gentled him."—William Safire, 1977.) But Archer represents something else: an author aiming at high office. It sounds ominous; the ability not just to exercise control over your characters' lives but to kill them off at will could have damaging consequences for urban policy. No wonder that distinguished failure has been the norm; neither Gore Vidal, who ran for Congress in upstate New York in 1960, nor Norman Mailer, who ran for mayor of the city nine years later, was able to sway the electorate.



Lately, there have been more encouraging precedents: Vaclav Havel made an unusual career move from embattled playwright to castle-dwelling President. It must be said that Jeffrey Archer is not a good writer; he is, indeed, barely a writer at all, having reserved his fictive genius for his C.V. Nevertheless, he is a successful one. Entire terminals are constructed at international airports to house copies of his latest paperback. But why should the field be left to the thriller writers? And where will it end? Political hopefuls are now expected to deliver a book as part of their campaign strategy; some, like John McCain, have an inspiring story to tell, while others, like George W. Bush, have little patches of story that they don't want told at all. But if books—less vulgar than speechmaking, more flattering to the vanity of the voter—are really going to start winning elections, then politics will soon become much too important, and too wordy, to be left to the politicians. So why not make matters easy and nominate writers in the first place?

Picture the scene: The early days of a twenty-first-century Administration, with Patricia Cornwell being sworn in as Secretary of Defense. (Motto: "Gays

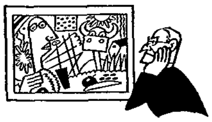
ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

in the military? You betcha.") Elmore Leonard takes over from Janet Reno and immediately withdraws all lawsuits against the tobacco companies. An equal ease reigns at the State Department, where the newly appointed Judith Krantz solves the Kosovar refugee crisis at a stroke by pointing out that a really good orgasm will take you to a different plane. Behind the scenes a smiling Andrew Wylie, literary agent turned kingmaker, ponders his next move; the War Room is rife with speculation that Thomas Harris may be up for Surgeon General. There are rumors, but only rumors, that Don DeLillo has been seen at the Pentagon. On a flying visit to New York, Mayor Archer lunches with his opposite number, Mayor King—or Stephen, as he likes to be called. The Mayor is forging ahead with his mold-breaking plans. No lights in Central Park. A ban on rabies shots. Metrocards honored at the city morgue. Blood donations available from your nearest A.T.M. And, at midnight, in the Bronx Zoo, the latch to be lifted softly on every cage.

—ANTHONY LANE

AROUND CITY HALL

Damien Hirst and the Mayor call each other names.



LAST week, when Rudolph Giuliani declared the works in the upcoming exhibit of young British artists at the Brooklyn Museum of Art to be "sick stuff," it became clear that the Mayor and Damien Hirst have very different aesthetic sensibilities. Not surprisingly, the two have rather different notions about zoning issues as well.

Several years ago—Hirst was a little shaky on exactly when—the artist spent six months living in New York, and during that time he was a regular at Billy's Topless, on Sixth Avenue and Twenty-fourth Street. Although Hirst has not really kept up with municipal affairs, he was, it seemed, up to date on the Mayor's recent attempts to use changes in city zoning laws to close Billy's down. "I hear it's not topless anymore," Hirst lamented when reached by telephone at his home in Devon. He went on to say that the only thing that shocked him about the Mayor's fierce reaction to the upcoming exhibit, which includes four of his by now familiar animals suspended in formaldehyde, was that the works in the show still had the power to shock. "I made all that work ten years ago," he said dismissively.

Art criticism may be a new avocation for Mayor Giuliani, but his latest pronouncements are certainly of a piece with his earlier efforts as an arbiter of taste. The Mayor knows what he likes and what he doesn't. Chris Ofili, creator of "The Holy Virgin Mary"—a collage of the Madonna made from pages cut from porn magazines and decorated with globs of elephant dung—may have been aiming, as he explained to the *Times*, for a "hip-hop version" of the sacred image, but the Mayor isn't buying

IT'S ABOUT TIME DEPT.

MEMORANDUM

From: *Chairman of Special Projects, ABC Entertainment*
To: *Department of Current Programming*
Re: *Inclusiveness*

As some of you may already know, in recent weeks we have been asked by the N.A.A.C.P. and other organizations to demonstrate more inclusiveness in the casting of minorities in our entertainment programs.

Of course, our response has been simple and straightforward: We have always tried to be inclusive, but in the recent past we have been overwhelmed by a flood of talented white people.

Still, running a broadcast network means keeping a special covenant with the public, and at ABC we have no intention of turning a hearing-impaired ear to their concerns. In that spirit, please share with the producers of the following shows our suggestions for making our prime-time schedule look more like America:

- After four years of "The Drew Carey Show," we feel that we have mined all of the comedy possible in Drew's current workplace, a Cleveland department store, and it is time for a change of venue—to a swinging salsa club in Miami, Florida. Imagine the sparks that will fly as Drew lives *la vida loca* with the club's manager, sexy spitfire and Ph.D. candidate in economics Chichi Martinez.
- "Dharma & Greg": A straitlaced Wasp, a whacked-out hippie. Funny, yes, but what's missing from this picture? A Sikh neurosurgeon who moves next door—and thinks they're *both* nutty.
- Our research shows that "America's Funniest Home Videos" has underrepresented all of the funny things that happen to the Alaskan Inuit. Priority: Gather footage of slippery ice, igloo cave-ins, huskies in heat, etc.
- When we introduced "Two Guys, a Girl, and a Pizza Place," naysayers doubted whether a show could succeed with such an unwieldy title. Of course, we proved them wrong, as we will again this fall with our revamped version: "Two Guys, a Girl, a Pizza Place, and a Computer Programmer Named Abdul Who's a Positive Role Model for Arabs Everywhere."
- We believe that "Sports Night," last year's critics' darling, is poised for a breakout season this fall, especially once we introduce a new anchorman: Schlomo, an Orthodox Jew who won't read the basketball scores on Friday night. (Note to research department: How did focus group respond to new title, "Schwartz Night"?)
- Dick Clark is such a massive talent that it seems almost heretical to suggest that we add a co-host to his annual New Year's Eve special. And yet, if a special co-host came along, someone who could bring out a whole new dimension in Dick, it would be remiss of us to ignore it. That person, we believe, is Maya Angelou. Or, if Maya is not available, I. M. Pei.

We recognize that some of our more recalcitrant producers (you know who they are!) may bristle at the notion of making last-minute changes, especially when the ideas are coming from "the suits." But please remind them, we're all on the same team here at ABC, and the fall season is still a good four days away.

Peace out.

—ANDY BOROWITZ

MOST PEOPLE SEE A KID WHO'S BOUND TO MAKE TROUBLE.

Beneath the baggy clothes is usually just a kid who loves challenging gravity. And rather than causing problems, he may be creating solutions—by working with city officials to develop a municipal skate park.

Monitor readers know this thanks to a recent story in our Wednesday "Homefront" section.

In typical fashion, we looked beneath the surface views to present a bigger picture, without the cynicism so common in today's reporting. As we do on everything from kids to Kosovo.

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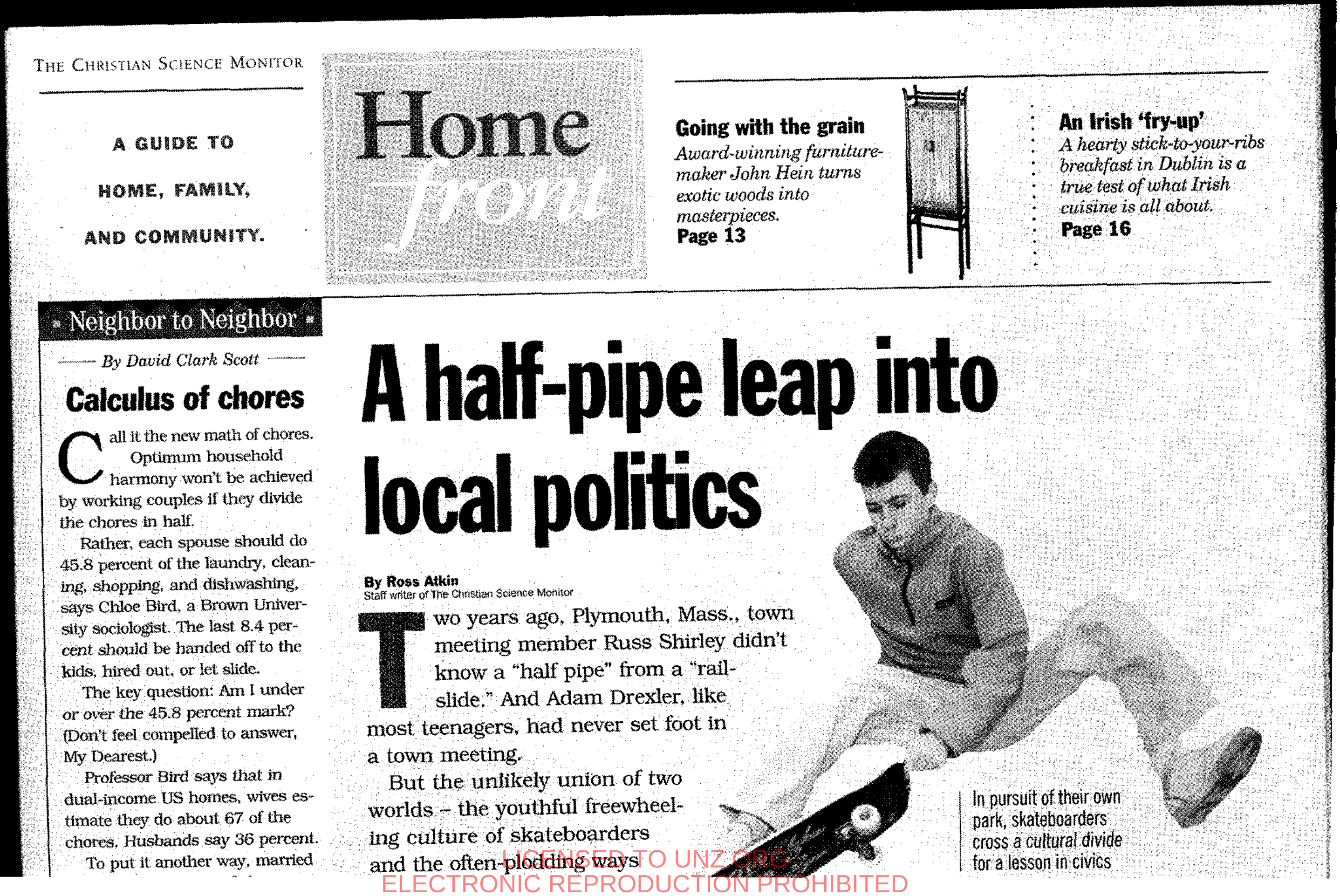


THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

A GUIDE TO HOME, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY.

Home *front*

Going with the grain
Award-winning furniture-maker John Hein turns exotic woods into masterpieces.
Page 13

An Irish 'fry-up'
A hearty stick-to-your-ribs breakfast in Dublin is a true test of what Irish cuisine is all about.
Page 16

Neighbor to Neighbor

By David Clark Scott

Calculus of chores

Call it the new math of chores. Optimum household harmony won't be achieved by working couples if they divide the chores in half.

Rather, each spouse should do 45.8 percent of the laundry, cleaning, shopping, and dishwashing, says Chloe Bird, a Brown University sociologist. The last 8.4 percent should be handed off to the kids, hired out, or let slide.

The key question: Am I under or over the 45.8 percent mark? (Don't feel compelled to answer, My Dearest.)

Professor Bird says that in dual-income US homes, wives estimate they do about 67 of the chores. Husbands say 36 percent.

To put it another way, married

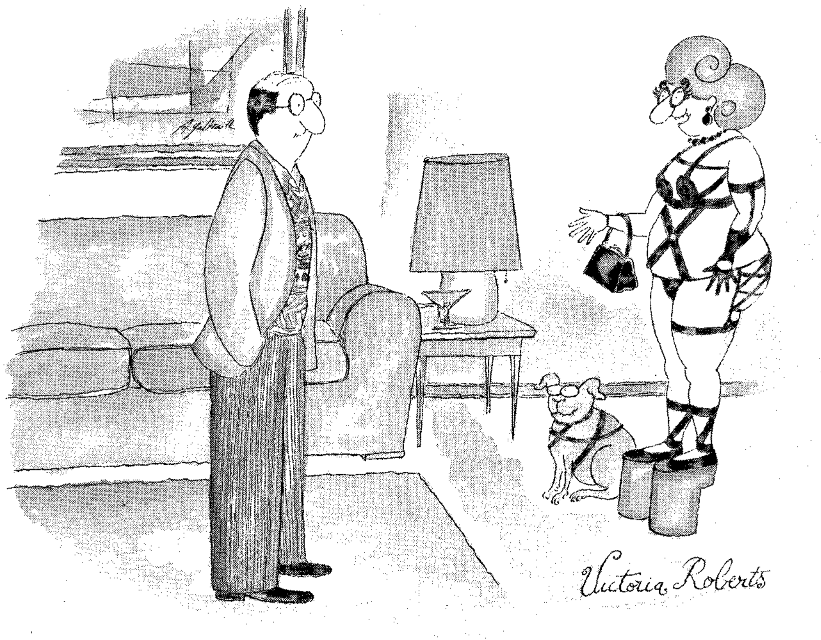
A half-pipe leap into local politics

By Ross Atkin
Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

Two years ago, Plymouth, Mass., town meeting member Russ Shirley didn't know a "half pipe" from a "rail-slide." And Adam Drexler, like most teenagers, had never set foot in a town meeting.

But the unlikely union of two worlds – the youthful freewheeling culture of skateboarders and the often-plodding ways

In pursuit of their own park, skateboarders cross a cultural divide for a lesson in civics



"The ads just say 'Everybody in Leather'—they don't say how much."

• •

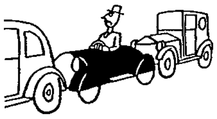
it. After threatening to cut off city funding to the museum and evict it from its municipally owned building, he offered a syllogism to prove that Ofili's work wasn't even art. "If I can do it, it's not art, because I'm not much of an artist, and I could figure out how to put this together," he said. "You know, if you want to throw dung at something, I could figure out how to do that."

As a piece of political theatre, the Mayor's outrage nicely complements the Brooklyn show, which is titled "Sensation" and which has been promoted with archly exaggerated warnings of its potentially hazardous effects. After all, the show's main conceit bears uncanny similarities to the chief conceit of Giuliani's mayoralty, which is that there is vitality, even pleasure, in the visceral experience of repugnance. If the museum's directors hadn't seemed genuinely anxious about losing their lease and seven million dollars a year, one could easily have imagined them incorporating videotapes of last week's press conferences into their press packages.

Hirst, who is preparing for a new show in New York next April, the contents of which he would not discuss, called the whole controversy "great for my career" and noted that nothing could do more for the price of his work than the museum's cancelling the exhibit altogether. At the same time, he was frankly critical of Giuliani's political style, with its inclinations toward empty sensationalism. "A few quiet calls," he suggested, would have been much more effective in pressuring the museum. The Mayor, he opined, "must be a bit stupid on some level."—ELIZABETH KOLBERT

ROAD-HOG DEPT.

When the President comes to town, New York rolls over.



THE President came to Manhattan last Tuesday to speak at the United Nations, and, for the sake of his motorcade, the police closed down First Avenue between Thirty-fourth and Fifty-first Streets, and almost all the eastbound streets off Second Avenue in the Thirties and Forties—bringing life aboveground on the East Side of midtown to a halt.

In traffic terms, this was not as bad as the gridlock that occurred in June, when the President came to Times Square to see a special performance of "The Iceman Cometh" and the police barricaded the area around Forty-second Street and Eighth Avenue for most of the afternoon, and parts of Forty-seventh Street for the whole day. That particular trip immobilized the busiest and most crowded section of the nation's busiest and most crowded city at one of the busiest and most crowded times of the year, and created a truly historic traffic jam that rippled uptown, downtown, and crosstown, and was still untangling itself long after the President flew home. But a gridlock purist would probably argue that the Times Square visit was sui generis, a once-in-a-Presidency kind of thing. And, besides, one imagines that most New Yorkers didn't mind giving up a few hours of their day in the cause of a beleaguered President's R. and R. (particularly given the parlous state of Washington, D.C., theatre).

Last week's U.N. visit is more typical and a bit more problematic. It seems that, once a month now, Mr. Clinton descends on the East Side, like a Chinese emperor, commanding all life surrounding him to cease. New Yorkers are famous for their impatience with the slightest inconvenience. Why on earth do they put up with this?

The conventional answer is that the President is the President and his safety is paramount. But there is nothing particularly safe about the current system. Any terrorist with a missile launcher or a bomb can tell what route the President is taking by reading about the street closings in the morning papers, and can tell exactly when the President is coming by watching for the enormous parade of police motorcycles, limousines, and black Chevy Suburbans that make up his motorcade. If the President really wanted to be safe, he'd take advantage of the anonymity and spontaneity offered by the city; he'd slip into town by some circuitous route, in a hired black Lincoln with tinted windows. Then he'd be invisible. But that's just it: when the President drags his motorcade into Manhattan, he's not using an urban model of safety; he's using a suburban model. In the suburbs, you cannot lose yourself in a crowd of black Lincolns or disappear in a maze of side streets. In the suburbs, safety lies in surrounding yourself with police escorts and bulletproof S.U.V.s for the dash down the freeway.

The tension between things urban and things suburban is a fixture of the race debate, of arguments over taxes and schools and transportation pol-

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icy. But in some ways it matters most on this very practical and prosaic level, because when suburban ideas (about safety or, for that matter, about anything) are imported into the city they have the capacity to make the everyday lives of lots of people acutely miserable.

On the same day last week that the President visited the U.N., for example, it rained in New York, and on the sidewalks of the city, here and there, were people carrying what are known in the accessories business as golf umbrellas: those huge umbrellas that range anywhere from three to almost five feet in diameter. A golf umbrella is, like the Presidential motorcade, a quintessentially suburban notion: it is supposed to be large enough to cover you and your clubs on the golf course, or to keep you and your children dry as you run across the mall parking lot to your station wagon. It is not meant for crowded city streets, and if you had followed all those people with golf umbrellas through midtown last Tuesday you would have seen their umbrellas getting tangled up with other people's umbrellas. You would have seen annoyed pedestrians stepping sharply out of the way to avoid being impaled by giant umbrella ribs, and, as a result, bumping into other people with umbrellas, until whole stretches of sidewalk—like the East Side in the grip of a White House visit—had turned into a sorry, congealed mess.

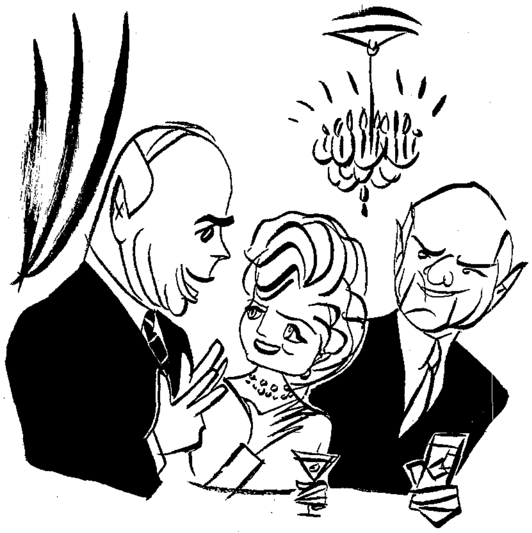
Mr. Clinton, as both a golfer and a soon-to-be suburbanite, presumably has a few golf umbrellas of his own. One only hopes that when he comes into Manhattan as a private citizen he remembers where he is and, this time, at least, leaves that bit of the suburbs at home. —MALCOLM GLADWELL

LOS ANGELES POSTCARD

The war hero goes to Hollywood.

One day earlier this month, around a hundred guests drove up to the gates of Arianna Huffington's Italianate mansion, in Brentwood, for lunch with John McCain, the Presidential candidate and conservative Republican senator from Arizona. Huffington, the newspaper columnist and hostess, was giving the event with Barry Diller, the entertainment tycoon, to celebrate the Senator's new memoir, "Faith of My Fathers," and to introduce him to a roomful of influential media and show-business people. One guest looked around the party and speculated that McCain, who spent five years in captivity in Vietnam, was the only man present who had not dodged the draft.

While Huffington's seventy-seven-year-old mother, Elli, who is Greek, padded around the party, Cassandra-like, in bare feet and a muumuu, the locals compared notes about the Presidential race. Larry King said that he was increasingly impressed with Governor Jesse Ventura, of Minnesota. "Jesse's a very brainy guy," he said. "The dream race would be between Warren Beatty and Jesse Ventura."



McCain, Huffington, and Diller

"No, no, no," Barry Diller interrupted. "The dream race is Warren Beatty against Gary Bauer."

Huffington commented, "Warren was invited, but when he heard there would be press he called and said he didn't want to detract attention from the Senator." The Senator, for his part, had only kind words for his potential adversary, calling the movie star "an articulate spokesman for the liberal point of view," and solemnly adding, "I respect him."

After guests helped themselves from a buffet of salmon, Thai chicken, and Caprese salad, Huffington introduced Barry Diller, noting that he was "No. 8 on *Vanity Fair's* list of the most powerful men in the Information Age. He is behind Rupert Murdoch but ahead of Michael Eisner, though he assures me that he is well ahead of both in the happiness stakes." Diller then said a few words about McCain, whom he called "a war hero and a man of honor." With a sideways glance at the Senator, he grinned and said, "Honor? You're in the wrong city."

The Senator addressed the group on a veranda that overlooked a swimming pool and, beyond it, a grand lawn decorated with animal-shaped topiary. With a zaftig green bear visible off to the side, he joked about his surroundings: "One of the big differences between me and President Clinton is that he wants every American to have a home, and I want every American to have a home just like this one." McCain said that he had a few ties to Los Angeles, including the fact that his wife, Cindy, had attended U.S.C., which he referred to as "the University of Spoiled Children."

"I like John McCain," Huffington said later, as the guests, carrying autographed copies of the Senator's book, started to leave. "All the other candidates talk about prosperity, and I'm tired of hearing about prosperity. He's the only one who talks about *sacrifice*." Then she huddled with the caterers. In four hours, guests would be arriving for another party, a dinner for the writer Elizabeth Drew, in honor of her new book. "There are beds upstairs," Huffington said, waving toward a grand circular stairway in the center hall, "for anyone who needs a rest before the next event." —ANN LOUISE BARDACH

INK

See Spot run to the newsstand!

If it is a truism that pets resemble their owners, it seems odd that so few humans insure that their animal companions reflect favorably upon them. Pets can be horribly revealing. How thin is the line between the truly urbane cat and the cat who mistakes dull

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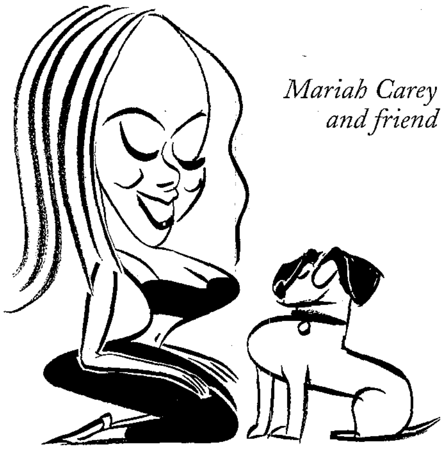
inexpressiveness for elegant reserve! And, for every appropriately heartwarming dog, how many others embarrass with their promiscuous, humid attentions?

Fortunately, there will soon be available a quarterly guide to stylish cross-species living: *Animal Fair*, a glossy magazine focussing on the life styles of celebrities and their pets, which will appear on newsstands November 2nd. The début issue of the magazine, which is being distributed by Time-Warner, features Mariah Carey and her Jack Russell terrier, Brad Pitt with his weimaraners, and Linda Evangelista, who agreed to pose with the photographer Bruce Weber's golden retrievers. Wendy Diamond, *Animal Fair's* founder and editorial director (and also the owner of two cats, thirty-seven fish, and a Maltese named Lucky), is happily poised to become the Martha Stewart of the bone and the milk dish. As such, she wishes from the outset to distinguish her magazine from the common run of pet publications. *Animal Fair*, she explained the other day, is "not for anyone who would be reading *Dog Fancy*. *Dog Fancy* is a mass magazine for people who are fanciers, basically, and more Midwest. It runs articles about your dog eating your shoes. *Animal Fair* is about designing a life style with your pet. It's more sophisticated."



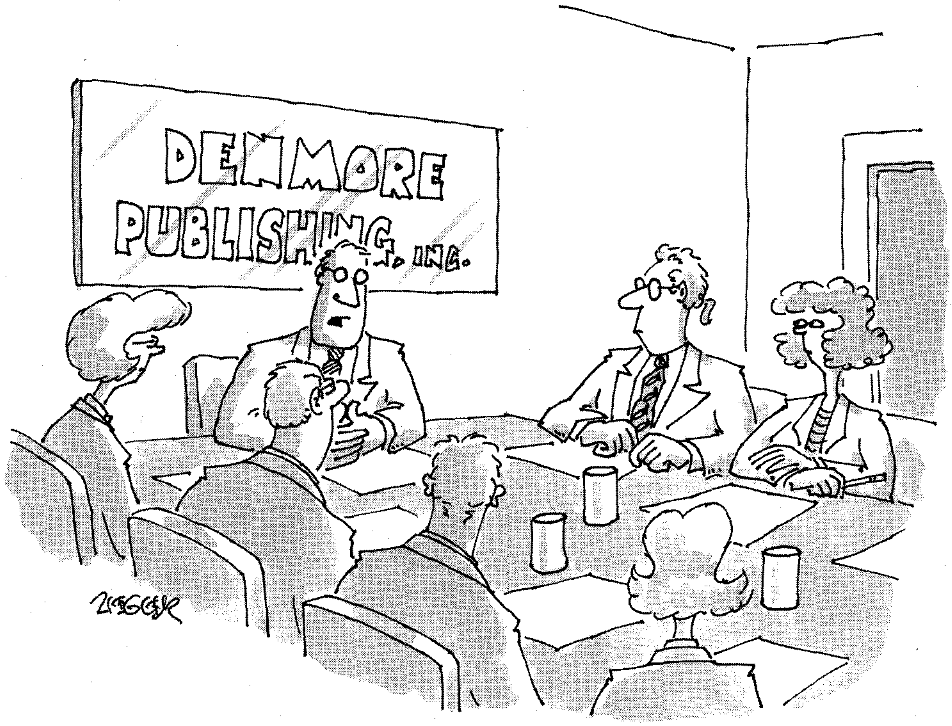
Mariah Carey and friend

Described by Melissa Curran, the magazine's vice-president for marketing, as "*In-Style* meets *People* meets *Wallpaper* for pet owners and animal-lovers," *Animal Fair* will include regular features such as "Reel Pets" (pets in film) and "Star Pets" (pet astrology—"How your pet is going to behave this month and why"). Readers can also expect stories on hero pets (the Russian puppy who went up into space, the first guide dog for the blind), senior pets, luxury kitty cabanas, and four-legged spring fashion. The magazine will be launched with a fashion show, "Paws for Style," at the Puck Building, at which animal-loving celebrities will walk down a runway leading dogs attired in garments designed specially for the show. Eleanor Mondale will walk with her Rottweiler, Fiona, who will be dressed in a dog tuxedo designed by Pamela Dennis. Bill Blass is preparing a look for a bulldog named Winston. Vera Wang has created an olive silk shirt for Sophie, a Jack Russell, and Donna Karan is readying a gray hooded DKNY sweatshirt for a Rottweiler named Cora. After the show, the canine couture will be auctioned off to benefit animal charities. (Ten per cent of the magazine's subscription revenues will also be donated to bestial causes.)

On being asked whether she feared a backlash from pet owners angered by the dog-heaviness of the magazine's launch, Curran said that *Animal Fair's* staff has given such matters considerable thought. "I think our Web site lends itself to wild animals," she said carefully, "while the magazine will start off more canine and feline. We are probably light on reptile and equine, but there is a safari feature and one about monkeys and so on."

In the advertising community, reactions to *Animal Fair* have been mixed. "This is not a joke, right?" asked Gene DeWitt, the chairman of DeWitt Media, when his opinion on the subject was solicited. Steve Klein, a managing partner at the advertising agency Kirshenbaum Bond & Partners and the owner of a yellow Labrador named Bear, was more positive. "Mixing fashion with pets is fun!" Klein exulted over the telephone. When he was asked what sort of client he thought would want to advertise in the magazine, Klein replied, "Any fashion client—or any fun fashion client. Calvin Klein's pretty serious, but I think Ralph Lauren would be perfect. I mean, if Ralph Lauren painted a picture of his customer, he'd be sitting in a big leather chair in Connecticut with a dog by his side. Betsey Johnson's customer would be a very dolled-up woman with a Persian cat. Diesel's is some guy with a nose ring and a parrot on his shoulder. It's the fashion life style."

—LARISSA MACFARQUHAR



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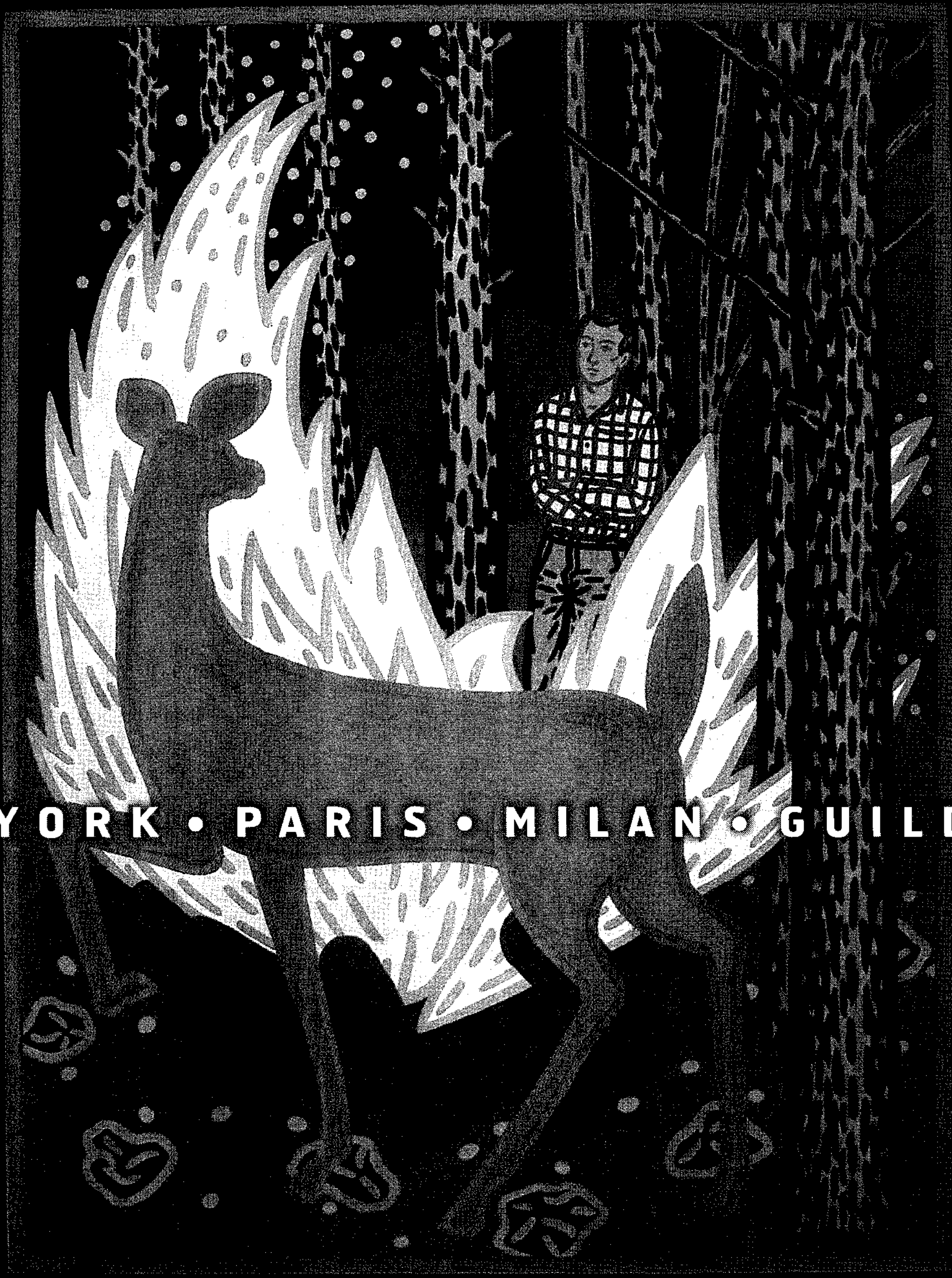NEW YORK • PARIS • MILAN • GUILD.COM

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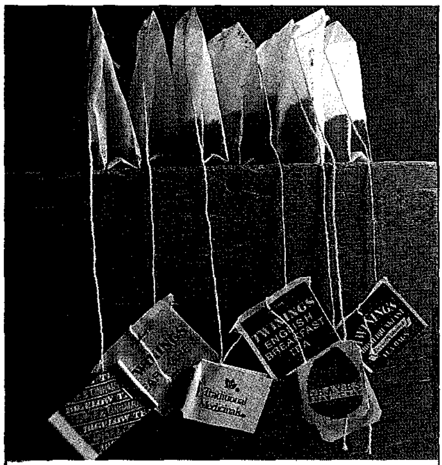

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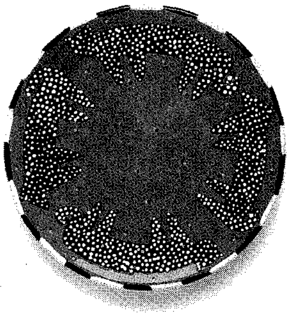

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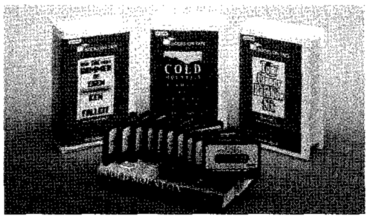

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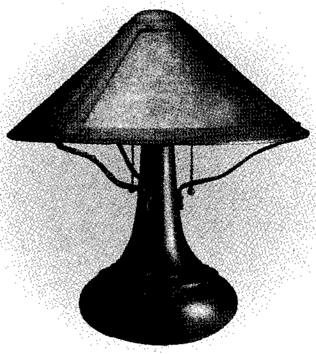

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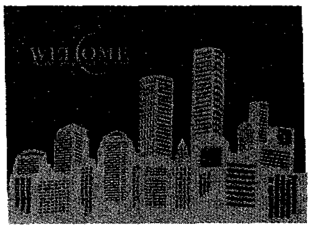

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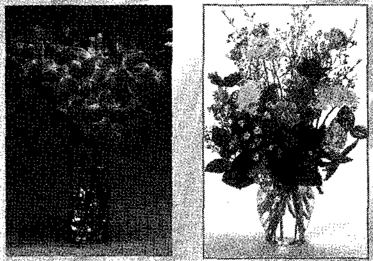

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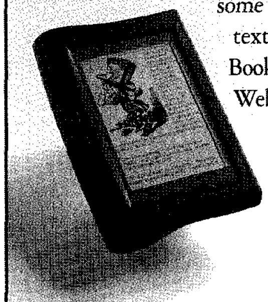

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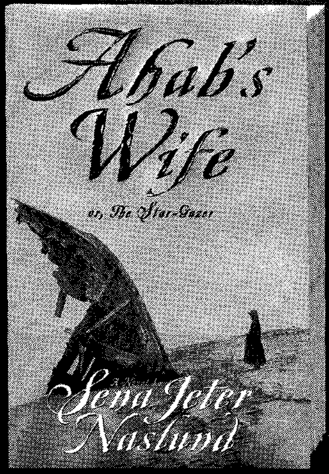

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ANNALS OF MARKETING

THE SCIENCE OF THE SLEEPER

How the Information Age could blow away the blockbuster.

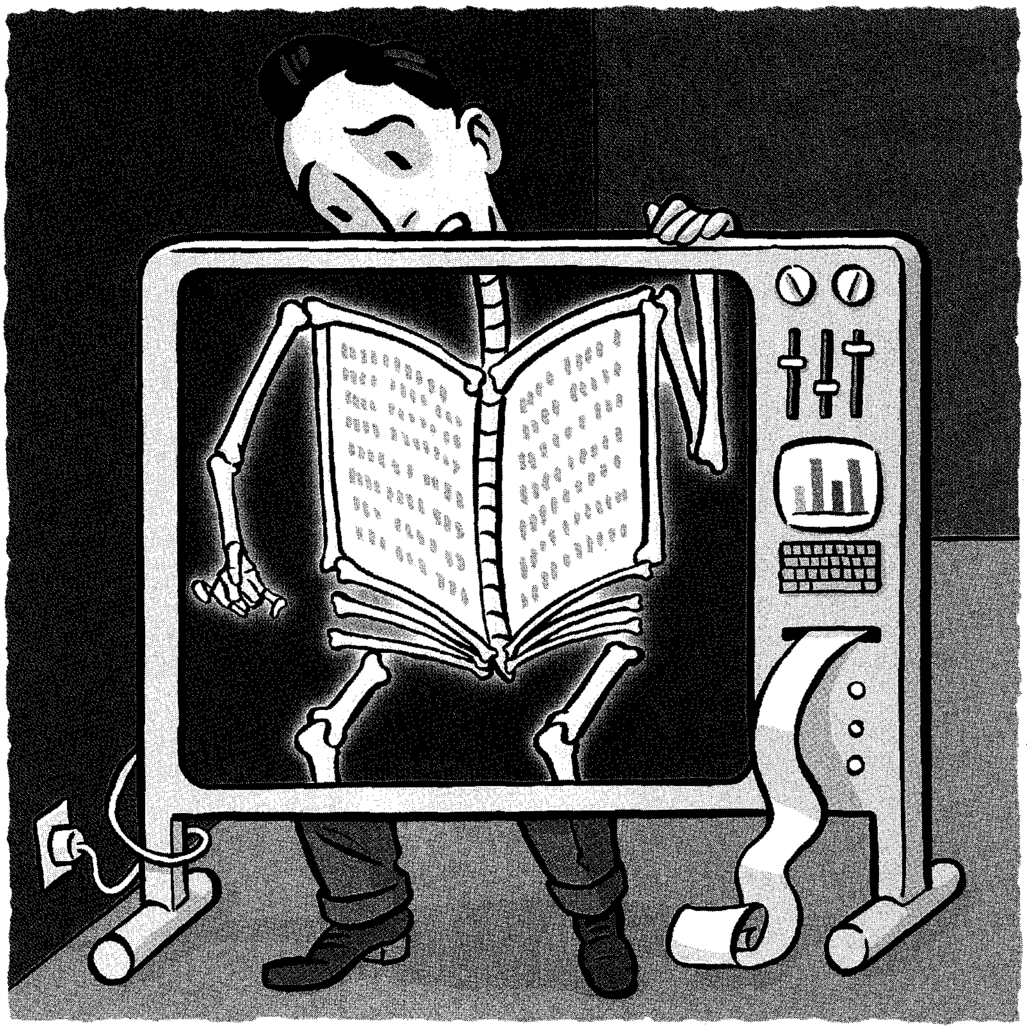
BY MALCOLM GLADWELL

IN 1992, a sometime actress named Rebecca Wells published a novel called "Little Altars Everywhere" with a small, now defunct press in Seattle. Wells was an unknown author, and the press had no money for publicity. She had a friend, however, who spent that Thanksgiving with a friend who was a producer of National Public Radio's "All Things Considered." The producer read the book and passed it on to Linda Wertheimer, a host of the show, and she liked it so much that she put Wells on her program. That interview, in turn, was heard by a man who was listening to the radio in Blytheville, Arkansas, and whose wife, Mary Gay Shipley, ran the town bookstore. He bought the book and gave it to her; she loved it, and, with that, the strange and improbable rise of Rebecca Wells, best-selling author, began.

Blytheville is a sleepy little town about an hour or so up the Mississippi from Memphis, and Mary Gay Shipley's bookstore—That Bookstore in Blytheville—sits between the Red Ball Barber Shop and Westbrook's shoe store on a meandering stretch of Main Street. The store is just one long room in a slightly shabby storefront, with creaky floors and big overhead fans and subject headings on the shelves marked with Post-it notes. Shipley's fiction section takes up about as much shelf space as a typical Barnes & Noble devotes to, say, homeopathic medicine. That's because Shipley thinks that a book buyer ought to be able to browse and read the jacket flap of everything that might catch her eye, without being overwhelmed by thousands of choices. Mostly, though, people come to Mary Gay Shipley's store in order to find out what Mary Gay thinks they ought to be reading, and in 1993 Mary Gay Shipley thought people ought to be reading "Little Altars Everywhere." She began ordering it by the dozen, which, Shipley says, "for us, is huge." She put it in the little rack out front where she lists her current favorites. She wrote about it in the newsletter she sends to her regular customers. "We could tell it was going to have a lot of word of mouth," she says. "It was the kind of book where you could say, 'You'll love it. Take it home.'" The No. 1 author at That Bookstore in Blytheville in 1993 was John Grisham, as was the case in nearly every bookstore in the country. But No. 2 was Rebecca Wells.

"Little Altars Everywhere" was not a best-seller. But there were pockets of devotees around the country—in Blytheville; at the Garden District Book Shop, in New Orleans; at Parkplace books, in Kirkland, Washington—and those pockets created a buzz that eventually reached Diane Reverand, an editor in New York. Reverand published Wells's next book, "Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood," and when it hit the bookshelves the readers and booksellers of Blytheville, the Garden District, and Kirkland were ready. "When 'The Ya-Ya Sisterhood' came out, I met with an in-store sales rep from HarperCollins," Shipley said. She is a tall woman with graying hair and a quiet, dignified bearing. "I'm not real sure he knew what a hot book this was. When he came in the store, I just turned the page of the catalogue and said, 'I want one hundred copies,' and his jaw fell to the table, because I usually order four or two or one. And I said, 'I want her to come here! And if you go anywhere, tell people this woman sells in Blytheville!'"

Wells made the trip to Arkansas and read in the back of Shipley's store; the house was packed, and the women in the front row wore placards saying "Ya-Ya." She toured the country, and the crowds grew steadily bigger. "Before the numbers really showed it, I'd be signing books and there would be groups of women who would come together, six or seven, and they would have me sign anywhere between three and ten books," Wells recalls. "And then, after that, I started noticing mothers and daughters coming. Then I noticed that the crowds started to be three-generational—there would be teen-agers and sixth graders.” “Ya-Ya” sold fifteen thousand copies in hardcover. The paperback sold thirty thousand copies in its first two months. Diane Reverand took out a single-column ad next to the contents page of *The New Yorker*—the first dollar she'd spent on advertising for the paperback—and sales doubled to sixty thousand in a month. It sold and sold, and by February of 1998, almost two years after the book was published, it reached the best-seller lists. There are now nearly three million copies in print. Rebecca Wells, needless to say, has a warm spot in her heart for people like Mary Gay Shipley. “Mary Gay is a legend,” she says. “She just kept putting my books in people's hands.”



Systems that use "collaborative filtering" try to predict what books you'll like; the more information they have about your preferences, the more accurate, and idiosyncratic, their recommendations.

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

IN the book business, as in the movie business, there are two kinds of hits: sleepers and blockbusters. John Grisham and Tom Clancy and Danielle Steel write blockbusters. Their books are announced with huge publicity campaigns. Within days of publication, they leap onto the best-seller lists. Sales start high—hundreds of thousands of copies in the first few weeks—and then taper off. People who buy or watch blockbusters have a clear sense of what they are going to get: a Danielle Steel novel is always—well, a Danielle Steel novel. Sleepers, on the other hand, are often unknown quantities. Sales start slowly and gradually build; publicity, at least early on, is often nonexistent. Sleepers come to your attention by a slow, serendipitous path: a friend who runs into a friend who sets up the interview that just happens to be heard by a guy married to a bookseller. Sleepers tend to emerge from the world of independent bookstores, because independent bookstores are the kinds of places where readers go to ask the question that launches all sleeper hits: Can you recommend a book to me? Shipley was plugging Terry Kay's “To Dance with the White Dog” long before it became a best-seller. She had Melinda Haynes lined up to do a reading at her store before Oprah tapped “Mother of Pearl” as one of her recommended books and it shot onto the best-seller lists. She read David Guterson's “Snow Falling on Cedars” in manuscript and went crazy for it. “I called the publisher, and they said, ‘We think it's a regional book.’ And I said, ‘Write it down. “M.G.S. says this is an important book.” ’ ” All this makes it sound as if she has a sixth sense for books that will be successful, but that's not quite right. People like Mary Gay Shipley don't merely predict sleeper hits; they *create* sleeper hits.

Most of us, of course, don't have someone like Mary Gay Shipley in our lives, and with the decline of the independent bookstore in recent years the number of Shipleys out there creating sleeper hits has declined as well. The big chain bookstores that have taken over the bookselling business are blockbuster factories, since the sheer number of titles they offer can make browsing an intimidating proposition. As David Gernert, who is John Grisham's agent and editor, explains, “If you walk into a superstore, that's where being a brand makes so much more of a difference. There is so much more choice it's overwhelming. You see walls and walls of books. In that kind of environment, the reader is drawn to the known commodity. The brand-name author is now a safe haven.” Between 1986 and 1996, the share of book sales represented by the thirty top-selling hardcover books in America nearly doubled.

The new dominance of the blockbuster is part of a familiar pattern. The same thing has happened in the movie business, where a handful of heavily promoted films featuring “bankable” stars now command the lion's share of the annual box-office. We live, as the economists Robert Frank and Philip Cook have argued, in a "winner-take-all society," which is another way of saying that we live in the age of the blockbuster. But what if there were a way around the blockbuster? What if there were a simple way to build your very own Mary Gay Shipley? This is the promise of a new technology called collaborative filtering, one of the most intriguing developments to come out of the Internet age.

IF you want a recommendation about what product to buy, you might want to consult an expert in the field. That's a function that magazines like *Car and Driver* and *Sound & Vision* perform. Another approach is to poll users or consumers of a particular product or service and tabulate their opinions. That's what the Zagat restaurant guides and consumer-ratings services like J. D. Power and Associates do. It's very helpful to hear what an "expert" audiophile has to say about the newest DVD player, or what the thousands of owners of the new Volkswagen Passat have to say about reliability and manufacturing defects. But when it comes to books or movies—what might be called "taste products"—these kinds of recommendations aren't nearly as useful. Few moviegoers, for example, rely on the advice of a single movie reviewer. Most of us gather opinions from a variety of sources—from reviewers whom we have agreed with in the past, from friends who have already seen the movie, or from the presence of certain actors or directors whom we already like—and do a kind of calculation in our heads. It's an imperfect procedure. You can find out a great deal about what various critics have to say. But they're strangers, and, to predict correctly whether you'll like something, the person making the recommendation really has to know something about you.

That's why Shipley is such a powerful force in touting new books. She has lived in Blytheville all her life and has run the bookstore there for twenty-three years, and so her customers know who she is. They trust her recommendations. At the same time, she knows who they are, so she knows how to match up the right book with the right person. For example, she really likes David Guterson's new novel, "East of the Mountains," but she's not about to recommend it to anyone. It's about a doctor who has cancer and plans his own death and, she says, "there are some people dealing with a death in their family for whom this is not the book to read right now." She had similar reservations about Charles Frazier's "Cold Mountain." "There were people I know who I didn't think would like it," Shipley said. "And I'd tell them that. It's a journey story. It's not what happens at the end that matters, and there are some people for whom that's just not satisfying. I don't want them to take it home, try to read it, not like it, then not go back to that writer." Shipley knows what her customers will like because she knows who they are.

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Collaborative filtering is an attempt to approximate this kind of insider knowledge. It works as a kind of doppelgänger search engine. All of us have had the experience of meeting people and discovering that they appear to have the very same tastes we do—that they really love the same obscure foreign films that we love, or that they are fans of the same little-known novelist whom we are obsessed with. If such a person recommended a book to you, you'd take that recommendation seriously, because cultural tastes seem to run in patterns. If you and your doppelgänger love the same ten books, chances are you'll also like the eleventh book he likes. Collaborative filtering is simply a system that sifts through the opinions and preferences of thousands of people and systematically finds your doppelgänger—and then tells you what your doppelgänger's eleventh favorite book is.

John Riedl, a University of Minnesota computer scientist who is one of the pioneers of this technology, has set up a Web site called MovieLens, which is a very elegant example of collaborative filtering at work. Everyone who logs on—and tens of thousands of people have already done so—is asked to rate a series of movies on a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 means "must see" and 1 means "awful." For example, I rated "Rushmore" as a 5, which meant that I was put into the group of people who loved "Rushmore." I then rated "Summer of Sam" as a 1, which put me into the somewhat smaller and more select group that both loved "Rushmore" and hated "Summer of Sam." Collaborative-filtering systems

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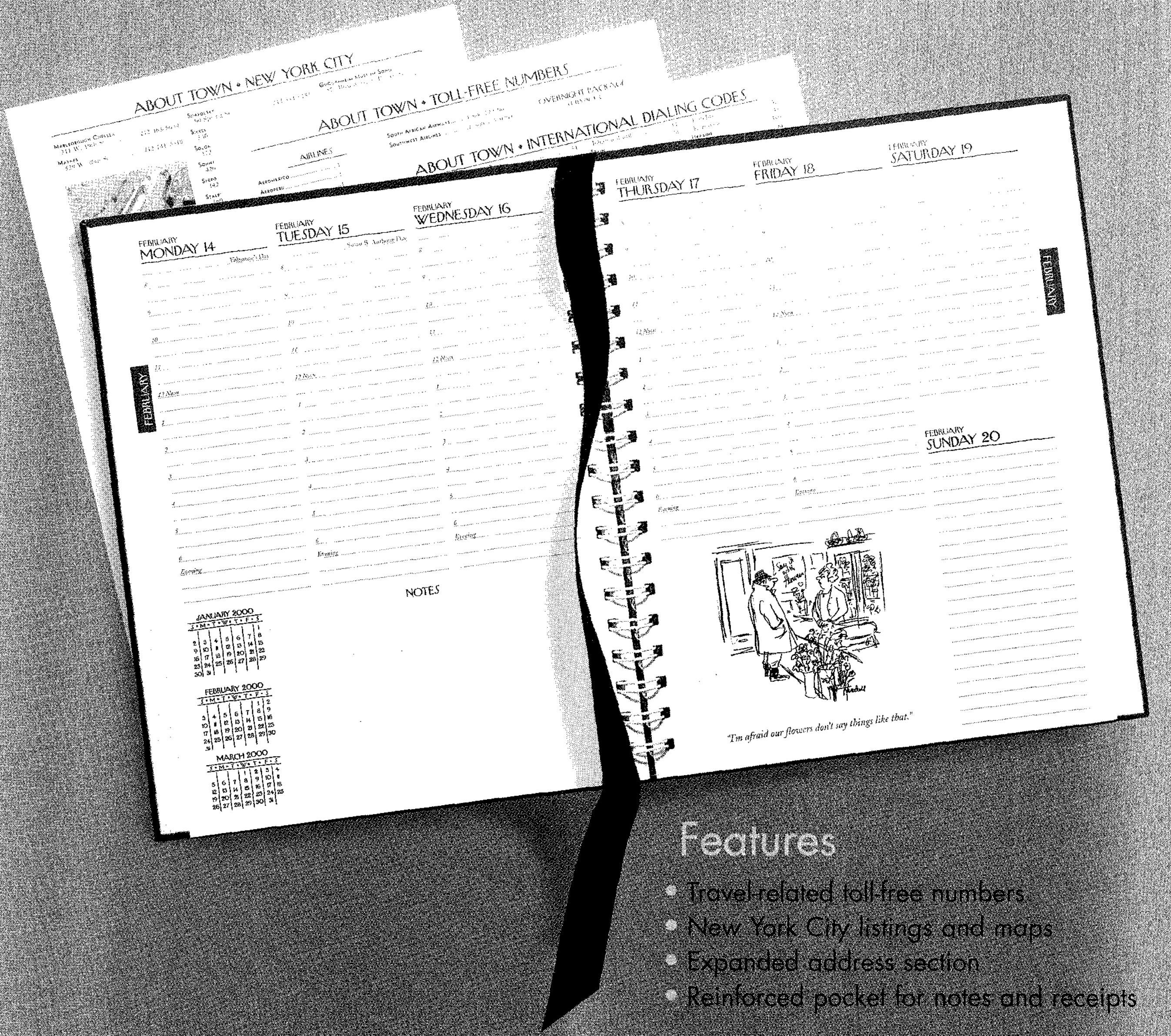
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"Richard and I are planning on taking some time off just to enjoy our purchases."

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don't work all that well at first, because, obviously, in order to find someone's cultural counterparts you need to know a lot more about them than how they felt about two movies. Even after I had given the system seven opinions (including "Election," 4; "Notting Hill," 2; "The Sting," 4; and "Star Wars," 1), it was making mistakes. It thought I would love "Titanic" and "Zero Effect," and I disliked them both. But after I had plugged in about fifteen opinions—which Riedl says is probably the minimum—I began to notice that the rating that MovieLens predicted I would give a movie and the rating I actually gave it were nearly always, almost eerily, the same. The system had found a small group of people who feel exactly the same way I do about a wide range of popular movies.

What makes this collaborative-filtering system different from those you may have encountered on Amazon.com or Barnesandnoble.com? In order to work well, collaborative filtering requires a fairly representative sample of your interests or purchases. But most of us use retailers like Amazon only for a small percentage of our purchases. For example, I buy the fiction I read at the Barnes & Noble around the corner from where I live. I buy most of my nonfiction in secondhand bookstores, and I use Amazon for gifts and for occasional work-related books that I need immediately, often for a specific and temporary purpose. That's why, bizarrely, Amazon currently recommends that I buy a number of books by the radical theorist Richard Bandler, none of which I have any desire to read. But if I were to buy a much bigger share of my books on-line, or if I "educated" the filter—as Amazon allows every customer to do—and told it what I think of its recommendations, it's easy to see how, over time, it could turn out to be a powerful tool.

In a new book, "Net Worth," John Hagel, an E-commerce consultant with McKinsey & Company, and his co-author, Marc Singer, suggest that we may soon see the rise of what they call "infomediaries," which are essentially brokers who will handle our preference information. Imagine, for example, that I had set up a company that collected and analyzed all your credit-card transactions. That information could be run through a collaborative filter, and the recommendations could be sold to retailers in exchange for discounts. Steve Larsen, the senior vice-president of marketing for Net Perceptions—a firm specializing in collaborative filtering which was started by Riedl and the former Microsoft executive Steven Snyder, among others—says that someday there might be a kiosk at your local video store where you could rate a dozen or so movies and have the computer generate recommendations for you from the movies the store has in stock. "Better yet, when I go there with my wife we put in my card and her card and say, 'Find us a movie we both like,' " he elaborates. "Or, even better yet, when we go with my fifteen-year-old daughter, 'Find us a movie all three of us like.' " Among marketers, the hope is that such computerized recommendations will increase demand. Right now, for example, thirty-five per cent of all people who enter a video store leave empty-handed, because they can't figure out what they want; the point of putting kiosks in those stores would be to lower that percentage. "It means that people might read more, or listen to music more, or watch videos more, because of the availability of an accurate and dependable and reliable method for them to learn about things that they might like," Snyder says.

One of Net Perceptions' clients is SkyMall, which is a company that gathers selections from dozens of mail-order catalogues—from Hammacher Schlemmer and L. L. Bean to the Wine Enthusiast—and advertises them in the magazines that you see in the seat pockets of airplanes. SkyMall licensed the system both for their Web site and for their 800-number call center, where the software looks for your doppelgänger while you are calling in with your order, and a few additional recommendations pop up on the operator's screen. SkyMall's system is still in its infancy, but, in a test, the company found that it has increased the total sales per customer somewhere between fifteen and twenty-five per cent. What's remarkable about the SkyMall system is that it links products from many different categories. It's one thing, after all, to surmise that if someone likes "The Remains of the Day" he is also going to like "A Room with a View." But it's quite another to infer that if you liked a particular item from the Orvis catalogue there's a certain item from Reliable Home Office that you'll also be interested in. "Their experience has been absolutely hilarious," Larsen says. "One of the very first recommendations that came out of the engine was for a gentleman who was ordering a blue cloth shirt, a twenty-eight-dollar shirt. Our engine recommended a hundred-and-thirty-five-dollar cigar humidor—and he bought it! I don't think anybody put those two together before."

The really transformative potential of collaborative filtering, however, has to do with the way taste products—books, plays, movies, and the rest—can be marketed. Marketers now play an elaborate game of stereotyping. They create fixed sets of groups—middle-class-suburban, young-urban-professional, inner-city-working-class, rural-religious, and so on—and then find out enough about us to fit us into one of those groups. The collaborative-filtering process, on the other hand, starts with who we are, then derives our cultural "neighborhood" from those facts. And these groups aren't permanent. They change as we change. I have never seen a film by Luis Buñuel, and I have no plans to. I don't put myself in the group of people who like Buñuel. But if I were to see "That Obscure Object of Desire" tomorrow and love it, and enter my preference on MovieLens, the group of people they defined as "just like me" would immediately and subtly change.

A group at Berkeley headed by the computer scientist Ken Goldberg has, for instance, developed a collaborative-filtering system for jokes. If you log on to the site, known as Jester, you are given ten jokes to rate. (Q.: Did you hear about the dyslexic devil worshipper? A.: He sold his soul to Santa.) These jokes aren't meant to be especially funny; they're jokes that reliably differentiate one "sense of humor" from another. On the basis of the humor neighborhood you fall into, Jester gives you additional jokes that it thinks you'll like. Goldberg has found that when he analyzes the data from the site—and thirty-six thou-

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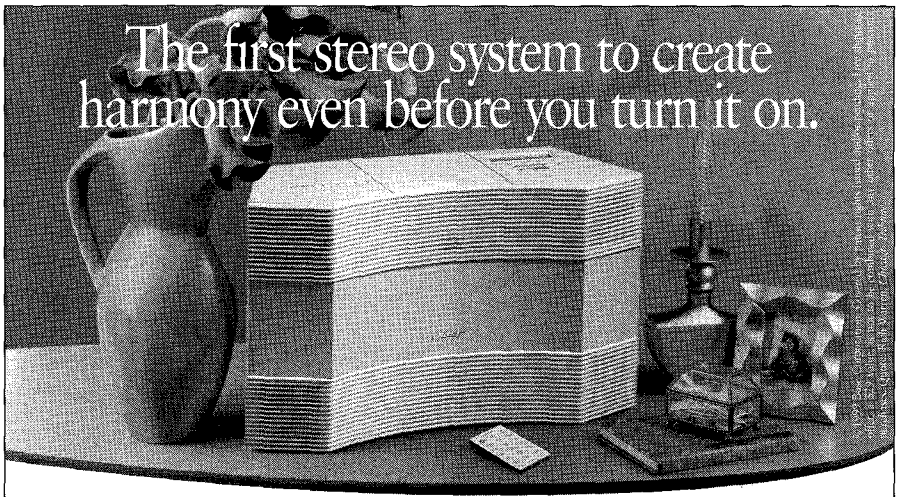

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sand people so far have visited Jester—the resulting neighborhoods are strikingly amorphous. In other words, you don't find those thirty-six thousand people congregating into seven or eight basic humor groups—off-color, say, or juvenile, or literary. "What we'd like to see is nice little clusters," Goldberg says. "But, when you look at the results, what you see is something like a cloud with sort of bunches, and nothing that is nicely defined. It's kind of like looking into the night sky. It's very hard to identify the constellations." The better you understand someone's particular taste pattern—the deeper you probe into what he finds interesting or funny—the less predictable and orderly his preferences become.

Collaborative filtering underscores a lesson that, for the better part of history, humans have been stubbornly resistant to learning: if you want to understand what one person thinks or feels or likes or does it isn't enough to draw inferences from the general social or demographic category to which he belongs. You cannot tell, with any reasonable degree of certainty, whether someone will like "The Girl's Guide to Hunting and Fishing" by knowing that the person is a single twenty-eight-year-old woman who lives in Manhattan, any more than you can tell whether somebody will commit a crime knowing only that he's a twenty-eight-year-old African-American male who lives in the Bronx. Riedl has taken demographic data from the people who log on to MovieLens—such as their age and occupation and sex—but he has found that it hardly makes his predictions any more accurate. "What you tell us about what you like is far more predictive of what you will like in the future than anything else we've tried," he says. "It seems almost dumb to say it, but you tell that to marketers sometimes and they look at you puzzled."

None of this means that standard demographic data is useless. If you were trying to figure out how to market a coming-of-age movie, you'd be most interested in collaborative-filtering data from people below, say, the age of twenty-eight. Facts such as age and sex and place of residence are useful in sorting the kinds of information you get from a recommendation engine. But the central claim of the collaborative-filtering movement is that, head to head, the old demographic and "psychographic" data cannot compete with preference data. This is a potentially revolutionary argument. Traditionally, there has been almost no limit to the amount of information marketers have wanted about their customers: academic records, work experience, marital status, age, sex, race, Zip Code, credit records, focus-group sessions—everything has been relevant, because in trying to answer the question of what we want marketers have taken the long way around and tried to find out first who we are. Collaborative filtering shows that, in predicting consumer preferences, none of this information is all that important. In order to know what someone wants, what you really need to know is what they've wanted.

HOW will this affect the so-called blockbuster complex? When a bookstore's sales are heavily driven by the recommendations of a particular person—a Mary Gay Shipley—sleepers, relatively speaking, do better and blockbusters do worse. If you were going to read only Clancy and Grisham and Steel, after all, why would you need to ask Shipley what to read? This is what David Gernert, Grisham's agent, meant when he said that in a Barnes & Noble superstore a brand like Grisham enjoys a "safe haven." It's a book you read when there is no one, like Shipley, with the credibility to tell you what else you ought to read. Gernert says that at this point in Grisham's career each of his novels follows the same general sales pattern. It rides high on the best-seller lists for the first few months, of course, but, after that, "his sales pick up at very specific times—notably, Father's Day and Mother's Day, and then it will sell well again for Christmas." That description makes it clear that Grisham's books are frequently bought as gifts. And that's because gifts are the trickiest of all purchases. They require a guess about what somebody else likes, and in conditions of uncertainty the logical decision is to buy the blockbuster, the known quantity.

Collaborative filtering is, in effect, anti-blockbuster. The more information the system has about you, the more narrow and exclusive its recommendations become. It's just like Shipley: it uses its knowledge about you to steer you toward choices you wouldn't normally know about. I gave MovieLens my opinions on fifteen very mainstream American movies. I'm a timid and unsophisticated moviegoer. I rarely see anything but very commercial Hollywood releases. It told me, in return, that I would love "C'est Arrivé Près de Chez Vous," an obscure 1992 Belgian comedy, and "Shall We Dance," the 1937 Fred and Ginger vehicle. In other words, among my moviegoing soul mates are a number of people who share my views on mainstream fare but who also have much greater familiarity with foreign and classic films. The system essentially put me in touch with people who share my tastes but who happen to know a good deal more about movies. Collaborative filtering gives voice to the expert in every preference neighborhood. A world where such customized recommendations were available would allow Shipley's well-read opinions to be known not just in Blytheville but wherever there are people who share her taste in books.

Collaborative filtering, in short, has the ability to reshape the book market. When customized recommendations are available, choices become more heterogeneous. Big bookstores lose their blockbuster bias, because customers now have a way of narrowing down their choices to the point where browsing becomes easy again. Of the top hundred best-selling books of the nineteen-nineties, there are only a handful that can accurately be termed sleepers—Robert James Waller's "The Bridges of Madison County," James Redfield's "The Celestine Prophecy," John Berendt's "Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil," Charles Frazier's "Cold Mountain." Just six authors—John Grisham, Tom Clancy, Stephen King, Michael Crichton, Dean Koontz, and Danielle Steel—account for sixty-three of the books on the list. In a world more dependent on collaborative filtering, Grisham, Clancy, King, and Steel would still sell a lot of books. But you'd expect to see many more books like "Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood"—many more new writers—make their way onto the best-seller list. And the gap between the very best selling books and those in the middle would narrow. Collaborative filtering, Hagel says, "favors the smaller, the more talented, more quality products that may have a hard time getting visibility because they are not particularly good at marketing."

In recent years, That Bookstore in Blytheville has become a mecca for fiction in the South. Prominent writers drop by all the time to give readings in the back, by the potbellied stove. John Grisham himself has been there nine times, beginning with his tour for "The Firm," which was the hit that turned him into a blockbuster author. Melinda Haynes, Bobbie Ann Mason, Roy Blount, Jr., Mary Higgins Clark, Billie Letts, Sandra Brown, Jill Conner Browne, and countless others have recently made the drive up from Memphis. Sometimes Shipley will host a supper for them after the reading, and send the proceeds from the event to a local literacy program.

There seems, in this era of megastores, something almost impossibly quaint about That Bookstore in Blytheville. The truth is, though, that the kind of personalized recommendation offered by Mary Gay Shipley represents the future of marketing, not its past. The phenomenal success in recent years of Oprah Winfrey's book club—which created one best-seller after another on the strength of its nominations—suggests that, in this age of virtually infinite choice, readers are starved for real advice, desperate for a recommendation from someone they know and who they feel knows them. "Certain people don't want to waste their time experimenting with new books, and the function we provide here is a filter," Shipley says, and as she speaks you can almost hear the makings of another sleeper on the horizon. "If we like something, we get behind it. I'm reading a book right now called 'Nissa's Place,' by Alexandria LaFaye. She's a woman I think we're going to be hearing more from." ♦

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[*From the Irish Times*]

Some inmates at Britain's first privately-run jail have asked to be moved—because staff are too friendly, according to a report out yesterday. The culture shock for some prisoners transferred to the relaxed and spotless Wolds jail at Brough in Humberside had proved so unsettling they asked to be sent back to jails characterised by more familiar "mutual antipathy" between staff and inmates.

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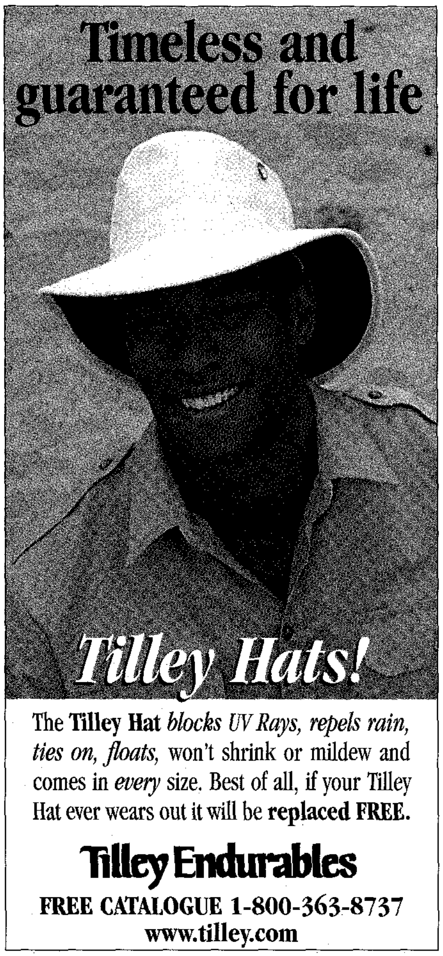

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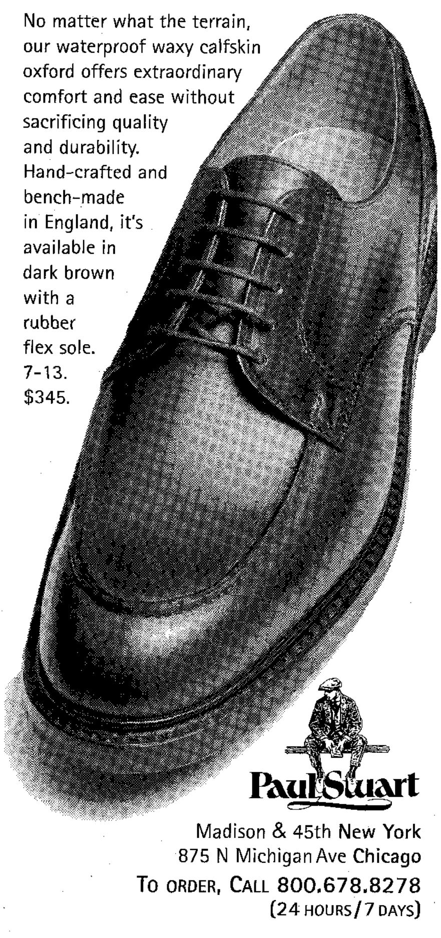

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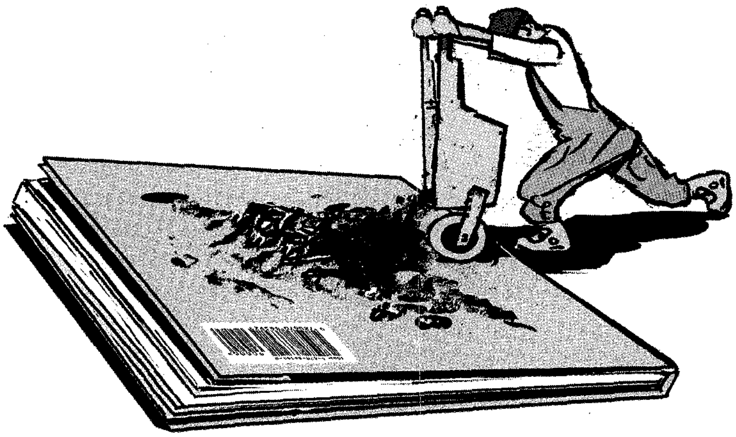

ISTVAN BANYAI

PHILISTINES tend to assume that the art of writing book-jacket blurbs is no art at all. Why, they sneer, a child of five could do it, if you gave the kid a list of suitable adjectives ("Tarnished superlatives," as Christopher Isherwood once called them) and a regular reviewing gig. But the book blurb is a minor literary form every bit as exacting and disciplined as the cinquain, the villanelle, or the Petrarchan sonnet. Many illustrious authors have attempted it and failed. Just as Herman Melville never penned a catchy poem, so Samuel Beckett was a hopeless amateur when it came to coughing up a bit of Advance Praise. When he was asked to provide a blurb for the young experimental novelist B. S. Johnson, Beckett could manage nothing snappier than "I regard him as a most gifted writer and deserving of far more attention than he has received up to now."

That's it. Not so much as a "shatteringly original." Still, compare Beckett's blurbs to some that eminent poets have come up with, and he starts to look like Saatchi & Saatchi. Marianne Moore provided so many blurbs for her friends that an entire section of her "Complete Prose" is given over to the form, but it's hard to believe that recipients of her praise would have flushed to their roots with pleasure. Here is Miss Moore on John Ashbery: "I find him prepossessing." And on Kenneth Burke: "To begin with, a poet. His absence of affectation is one of the rarest things on earth. 'Towards a Better Life' is a book to annotate. Un-stodgy *he!*" This last is a more promising try, what with the superlative and the italics and the exclamation mark, but she nevertheless manages to fumble the ball.

To take a more contemporary example, the reclusive English writer J. H. Prynne, who is regarded by a group of avant-garde intellectuals as the most important British poet of the last half-century (or, to put it another way, "the most important British poet of the last half-century"—*The New Yorker*), was somehow tempted to provide a puff for Iain Sinclair's novel "Downriver." The result: "A powerful beast fable that runs tapping and casting in violent seduction of the cuticle."

Plainly, literary talent alone is not enough to make a first-rate blurbist—sombre news for the rising man or woman of letters who is hoping to join the immortals by riding on someone else's back cover. But there are a few reliable tricks of the trade that can be easily assimilated in an hour or so. If Beckett had known them, he might not have made such a sorry spectacle of his incompetence. Those of us in the racket call them the Seven Habits of Highly Successful Blurbing.

1—GUSH. As with other forms of flattery, you cannot possibly pile the praise on too thickly. "The best book ever written by man or woman. . . . Deserves to sell more copies than the Bible." Now, that's more like it. No matter that it's obviously a trifle tongue-in-cheek; this verdict from the magazine *Rebel Inc.* on Irvine Welsh's scabrous saga of Edinburgh junkies, "Trainspotting," now a Major Motion Picture, duly achieved the condition to which all blurbs should aspire, and was emblazoned in large letters across the book's front cover.

A closer look at the etymology of "blurb" reveals that gushing is implicit in the meaning of the word. "Blurb" was coined in 1907 by the humorist Gelett Burgess, of the "Purple Cow" rhyme. In his dictionary of invented words, "Burgess Unabridged," Burgess defined a blurb as "1. A flamboyant advertisement; an inspired testimonial. 2. Fulsome praise.... On the 'jacket' of the 'latest' fiction, we find the blurb; abounding in agile adjectives and adverbs, attesting that this book is the 'sensation of the year.' " Most of Burgess's spoof neologisms never made it off the pages of his dictionary, but "blurb"—and his usage of "bromide," in the nonchemical sense of "platitude"—evidently answered an unmet need in the century of Hype, and rapidly passed into common currency.

2—OBSERVE THE RULE OF THREE. A young anthropologist-turned-marketing-executive once explained to me that, in just about every culture she could think of, the number three represents infinity, and it is true that a skilled blurb artist will naturally gravitate toward verbal triads, in accordance with the idea that three nouns or, better still, three adjectives—"advanced, forthright, significant"—can exhaust the whole universe. It took me less than a minute of nosing around my local bookstore to locate these current examples: "Funny, sad, scary" (John Grisham, on Donna Tartt's "The Secret History"); "Enigmatic, obsessive, fascinating" (The Boston Review, on W. G. Sebald's "The Rings of Saturn"); "Elegant, thoughtful and wide-ranging" (the Miami Herald, on Mario Vargas Llosa's "Making Waves"). Enough, sufficient, plenty. Students wishing to proceed to advanced blurbing might steep themselves in the mature poetry of Robert Lowell, who was a grand master of the triple adjective—"loving, rapid, merciless"—and should also bear in mind the importance of adhering to the triadic principle when following our next rule:

3—MAKE COMPARISONS WITH OTHER LEADING BRAND NAMES. Exhibit A is the paperback edition of Bill Bryson's "A Walk in the Woods"; or, more precisely, its back cover. "Bryson is... great company right from the start—a lumbering, droll, neatnik intellectual who

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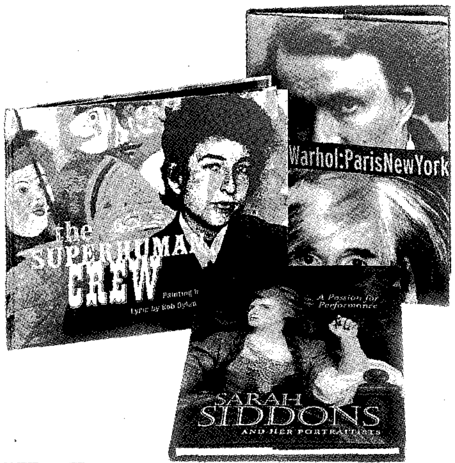

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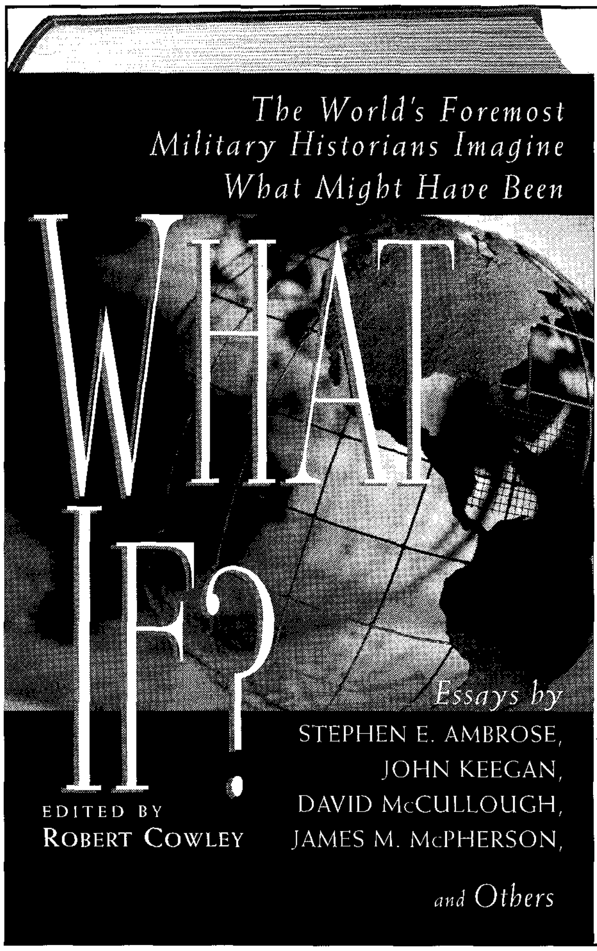

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comes off as equal parts Garrison Keillor, Michael Kinsley and . . . Dave Barry"—the *Times Book Review*. Beautifully done: observe the elegant symmetry of treble adjective with treble name-check, the friskiness of "neatnik," the faint but distinct whiff of a more learned age in "droll." (The Washington *Post Book World*, by way of dismal contrast, judged Bryson's work "choke-on-your-coffee funny," which strikes me as yawn-in-your-soup dull.) Let's just set it beside Exhibit B, which, not altogether by chance, is from the desk of Stephen King.

Mr. King is, as has often been noted, exceptionally generous in providing book-jacket endorsements, and sure enough, almost the first words to meet my eye in the bookshop were his. They graced the front cover of Tess Gerritsen's "Gravity": "She is better than Palmer, better than Cook . . . yes, even better than Crichton." (One, two, three. Excellent.) High praise, evidently, though King's comparisons were squandered on this particular browser: Crichton I recognize, Cook I think I recognize, but the only Palmers I can recall offhand are a nineteenth-century English landscape painter and a sometime golf champion. Still, as one would expect of the blurbmeister's blurbmeister, King is following another perfectly sound principle:

4—KNOW YOUR BROWSER. Which is to say, there's no point in invoking Wilkie Collins if you're thumping the tub for Jackie Collins. Brand comparisons should be offered as a guarantee of quality to connoisseurs of a genre; although I was ignorant enough to be left cold by King's words, no doubt legions of Whoosis Palmer fans would be goaded into stumping up for Gerritsen's novel. The Times Book Review's triple invocation of Garrison Keillor, Michael Kinsley, and Dave Barry certainly seemed just, as well. I had to admire the economy with which the blurb steered "A Walk in the Woods" toward aficionados of good-natured jokiness and away from those who might have taken it for an updated version of "Walden."

5—TRY TO BE MILDLY IDIOSYNCRATIC. Anyone who stubbornly maintains that blurbs belong to the history of publicity rather than the history of literature should reflect on the fact that one of the most exquisite gems of the form was the work of the Marxist Chilean poet Pablo Neruda. On the back cover of Julio Cortázar's collection of essays "Around the Day in Eighty Worlds," you will find the single line "Anyone who doesn't read Cortázar is doomed." Only genius could enable you to come up with something like that. With a little effort, though, you can season your plaudits with a mildly unexpected word or two—like "neatnik"—that will show you are a cut above the unimaginative dolts who just say "Read it and die laughing" (the *Daily News* on Barry, op. cit.). Jokes can be nice, but beware: you have to be Steve Martin to get away with "I laughed, I cried, and then I read the book" (on Eric Idle's "The Road to Mars"). Far better to play safe by adhering to the next rule:

6—MAKE APPOSITE PUNS. Almost childishly simple, this: consider the subject matter or title of the book under review, think of a praise word that chimes with it (e.g., "Pale Fire"—"Blazingly brilliant . . . a furnace of invention"; or "The Ice Storm"— "Glacial genius, frosty wit . . . chilling"), and your work is done. Outsiders might think that this gimmick is now so well worn as to have fallen into disrepute. Not at all: according to *Newsweek*, "Lorrie Moore soars with 'Birds of America,' " and *Entertainment Weekly* considered "The Perfect Storm" "guaranteed to blow readers away." You can take it from there.

7—LEARN FROM THE MASTER. Such, then, are the rudiments of the blurber's craft. A final hint, however. Students who wish to devote their lives to mastering their art could do worse than acquaint or reacquaint themselves with the great-grandfather of all blurbers, Mr. Puff, in Sheridan's comedy "The Critic." The play contains a brilliant taxonomy of the various species of puff, which anticipates the varieties of modern blurbery with astonishing accuracy; included on Sheridan's list are "the Puff collateral," "the Puff collusive," and "the Puff oblique, or Puff by implication." Most useful, however, is "the Puff direct," Mr. Puff's all-purpose account of the reception of a friend's play before it was ever performed: "Characters strongly drawn—highly colored—hand of a master—fund of genuine humor—mine of invention—neat dialogue—attic salt!" Though Sheridan's play is almost as old as the United States, it is every bit as lively. In fact, I would go so far as to say that "The Critic" is an urgent, thrilling, towering masterpiece. . . . I urge you to read it. ◆

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PARIS JOURNAL

THE ROOKIE

An American bedtime story.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

I DON'T really remember how we first thought of the Rookie. I think it may have been right after I saw my then three-year-old son, Luke, playing with a soccer ball in the Luxembourg Gardens. It wasn't just the kicking that scared me but a kind of nonchalant bend-of-the-body European thing he did as he rose to meet the ball with his head. Next, he would be wearing those terrible shorts and bouncing the ball from foot to foot, improving his "skills." He had been born in New York, but he had no memory of it. Paris is the only home he knows. (Or, as he explained to a friend, in the third person he occasionally favors, like Bo Jackson or General de Gaulle, "He was born in New York, but then he moved to Paris and had a happy life.")

"You want to have a catch?" I said, and he looked at me blankly.

That night at bedtime, I said, "Hey, I'll tell you about the Rookie." It was eight o'clock, but it was bright outside. Paris is a northern city, on a latitude with Newfoundland, as New York is a Mediterranean one, on a latitude with Naples, and so the light here in the hours between seven and nine at night is like the light in the hours between five and seven in New York. The sun is still out, but the sounds have become less purposeful—you hear smaller noises, high heels on the pavement—and though it is a pleasant time to lie in bed, it is not an easy time for a small boy to go to sleep.

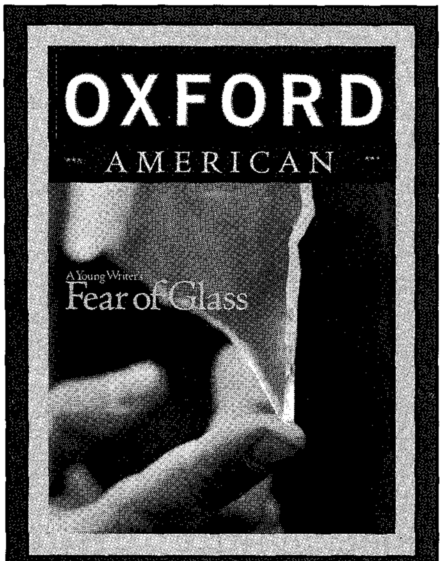
I had been drawing storytelling duty for a while, and had made increasingly frantic efforts to find a hit. A story about a little boy who turned into a fish in Venice hadn't gone anywhere, and a remake of "The Hobbit" had done no box-office at all. This story, though, rolled out easily. Every dad has one good bedtime story buried in him, and desperation will bring it out.

The Rookie (I said) was a small boy in Anywhere, U.S.A., in the spring of 1908. Out walking with his mom one day, he discovered that he had an uncanny gift for throwing stones at things. He picked one up and threw it so hard that it knocked a robin off its perch a mile away; and then, after his mama chided him, he threw another one, just as far but so soft that it snuggled into the nest beside the bird without breaking an egg. His parents, a little sadly but with a sense of obligation, immediately sent him off on the train to New York, to try out for the New York Giants and their great manager, John J. McGraw. All he took with him was a suitcase that his mother had packed for him, filled with things, including his bottle, that she thought might be useful in case of an emergency. (At that point, the contents of the suitcase were unparticularized, but they eventually included a complete dictionary of the animal languages, a saxophone, a design for the first car radio, compressed early-rocket-ship refuelling pills, a map of Paris, a window defogger, a time machine, a Sherlock Holmes deerstalker, a map of a secret route to the South Pole, and reindeer medicine for Santa's team.)

He got out at Grand Central, took a cab all the way uptown to the Polo Grounds—his mother had told him to take taxis in New York—and asked to see John J. McGraw. McGraw, staccato and impatient, was at first skeptical, but he finally agreed to watch while the kid threw, because he was so polite and the letter from his parents was so insistent, and because, well, you never know. He called Big Six, the great Christy Mathewson, out of the dugout to watch, and Chief Meyers, the great American Indian catcher, to get behind the plate. The Chief came out, with a weary, crippled, long-suffering gait, and squatted. (I thought of the Chief as a creased veteran, though the real Chief was still in his twenties, and not yet even a Giant.) The little guy walked to the mound, tugged at his cap—not a baseball cap, the cap of his knickers suit—and let fly. Everybody was impressed, to put it mildly. "Hey, Mr. McGraw!" cried the Chief. "I ain't never seen speed like that, and ain't he got movement on it, too!" "Well," Matty said mildly, peering at the tiny, doughty figure on the mound, "when you think about it, he's more or less got to have that upward movement on his fastball, don't he?" (My ideas of credible 1908 ballplayer dialogue were heavily influenced by Ring Lardner.) McGraw shrugged, since tryouts were one thing and baseball was another, but in the end he decided to give the kid a start that Sunday in a big benefit exhibition that the Gi-

If a three-year-old with a major-league fastball had ever existed, 1908 would have been the right season for him to play.

ISABELLE DERVAUX



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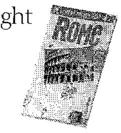

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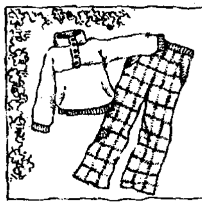

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ants were playing at the Polo Grounds against the Detroit Tigers.

I stopped. Outside, we could hear the steady, stop-and-start, rhythmic passage of the sanitation workers. Impossibly chic, in grass-green uniforms with a white stripe running down the side, the men of the Paris Propre come down our street every night to collect the garbage. The garbage is put out by *gardiens* in city-issued green plastic cannisters, and the garbagemen place the cannisters on little elevators, one on each side of the rear of the truck. The containers are lifted, turned upside down, shaken out, and returned trembling to the ground. Then the truck proceeds, at a stately, serene, implacable pace; a cabdriver who gets caught behind one on a little street lets out a moan, like a man who has just been bayonetted.

At this point, I decided I'd made a decent start and was getting ready to say good night. "Go on," he said, muffled but sharp, from under his covers. An order.

In the benefit exhibition that Sunday (I went on at last), the big bathtub-shaped stadium, with its strange supporting Y beams, was packed with fans, come to see the three-year-old phenom. The Rookie took the mound, throwing smoke, and it looked as though it might be a first, a perfect perfect game, twenty-seven men up, twenty-seven K's, until, in the sixth, he had to face the Terrible Ty Cobb. (I realized that I had a problem here, since Cobb should have been batting cleanup from the start; I explained that he had been late suiting up, because he insisted on extorting extra payment from the Tigers management for playing in a charity exhibition, even though everybody else was playing for free. Cobb was just like that, I explained: terrible.) The crowd quieted as the confrontation neared. Cobb came to the plate, sneering and drawling.

"Hey, baby," he called out, taunting the Rookie. "Looks to me like you're nothin' but a *baby*." (Luke's whole body stiffened; if there was a worse insult, he hadn't heard it—Jackie Robinson, in his first year with the Brooklyn Dodgers, had never been called a name so vile.) Shaken, the Rookie lost a bit off his heater. It was still blazing, though, and Cobb just got a piece of it, dribbling it toward first; he took off, and the Rookie, who knew his assignments, dutifully scampered over to cover. Cobb came in hard, hard as he could, his spikes sharpened to razor tips, and stamped down on the Rookie's three-year-old foot. The Rookie dropped the ball. Safe! Stinking rotten way to get on base, but safe all the same. Shaking off a couple of tears, the Rookie went back to the mound. "Hey, I reckon you're a crybaby. Hey, everybody—look at the crybaby! Looks to me like you're nothin' but a crybaby" came the taunting Georgia drawl from first, and the Rookie pitched out of trouble. But the pain lingered, and, in the top of the ninth, the Giants having pushed over one run on a hit-and-run executed by the Chief, he made a few mistakes, walked a couple of batters—hey, he was three—and left himself with the bases loaded and the Georgia Peach due up again. The crowd was going crazy, and now the taunting began again, worse than ever. ("Hey, baby! Hey, crybaby! Whyn't ya cry some more, crybaby?")

The Rookie knew what he had to do. In the dugout, he had taken his old bottle from the suitcase his mother had packed for him when he went off to join the Giants, just in case, and stowed it under his cap. Now he dripped a couple of drops of milk onto the seams of the baseball—the Rookie's soon-to-be notorious bottleball. It was before they brought in the rule against foreign substances on the ball, I explained. The Rookie was playing fair.

("Hey, when are you guys going to sleep?" Luke's mother's voice came from the other room. "Soon," I called back abruptly. The lights of the traffic on the Boulevard Saint-Germain came in through the windows, but I didn't even draw the curtains.)

The Rookie stretched and threw, and the bottleball dipped and twisted and dipped and twisted again—curving all the way out to the third-base line and then cruising halfway toward first before finally slipping in, soft and clean, right across the plate, a strike at the knees. Cobb had time to take a really good cut—he had *all day*—but the pitch had him so fooled that he didn't just whiff, he twisted himself in knots while he whiffed: real knots, his whole body pulled around like a wet washrag, hands ending up back of his butt. (Luke chuckled deeply at that.) "Steer-rike-uh three" cried the Umpire. The bleachers of the Polo Grounds went nuts.

The Rookie trotted off the field. "Who's the baby now, Mr. Cobb?" he asked, with quiet dignity, on his way back to the dugout.

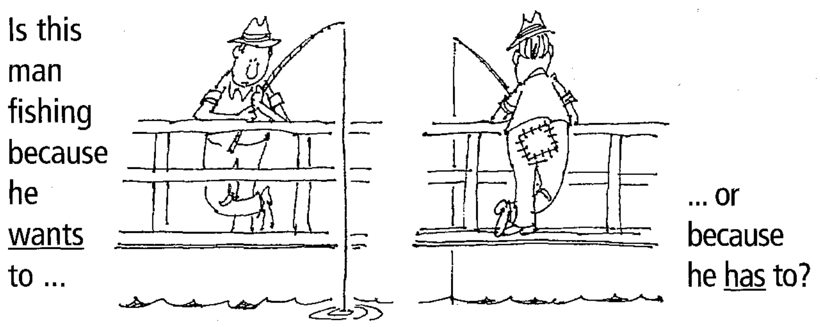
My kid sat up, shot up in bed, like a mechanical doll, as though he had a spring hinge right at his waist. Christy Mathewson (I went on) didn't say anything—that wasn't his way—but he went over as the Rookie came into the dugout, took off the Rookie's cap, and mussed up his hair. Outside, the crowd wouldn't leave. They chanted "Rookie! Rookie!"

Now the only sound from Luke's pillow was of short, constant breathing. I had the uncanny knowledge of a kind of silent excitement, the certainty—I have witnessed it once or twice on opening night in a theatre, though I had certainly never created it before myself—that what we had here was a hit. The Terrible Ty Cobb had called him a baby and he had thrown the bottleball, and then who was the baby?

That night (I said), the Rookie was offered a contract with the Giants (doubtless a mean, exploitative contract, but I left that out), and the team got on the overnight sleeper to St. Louis, heading out to steamy Sportsman's Park. (I knew that the Browns played there, not the Cardinals, but I liked the way it sounded.) The Chief tucked the Rookie into his berth and, before he went off to play pinochle with the guys, asked him, gruffly, "You O.K., Rookie?" "I'm O.K., Chief," the Rookie said, and then he listened to the sounds of the train tracks clacking and the whistle blowing and the other ballplayers in the next car, laughing and playing cards, before he fell deep asleep, somewhere outside Columbus.

"I'm O.K., Chief," Luke repeated, and he did something he had never done before, or, at least, not in my presence: without negotiation or hesitation, without tears or arguments or requests to come and sleep in the big bed, he rolled right over and fell asleep.

FROM then on, we had a story about the Rookie—Luke called it "the Rookie story"—every night. The characters firmed up pretty quickly. The Rookie was an earnest, resourceful, somewhat high-strung little hero. The Chief was blustery and honest, want-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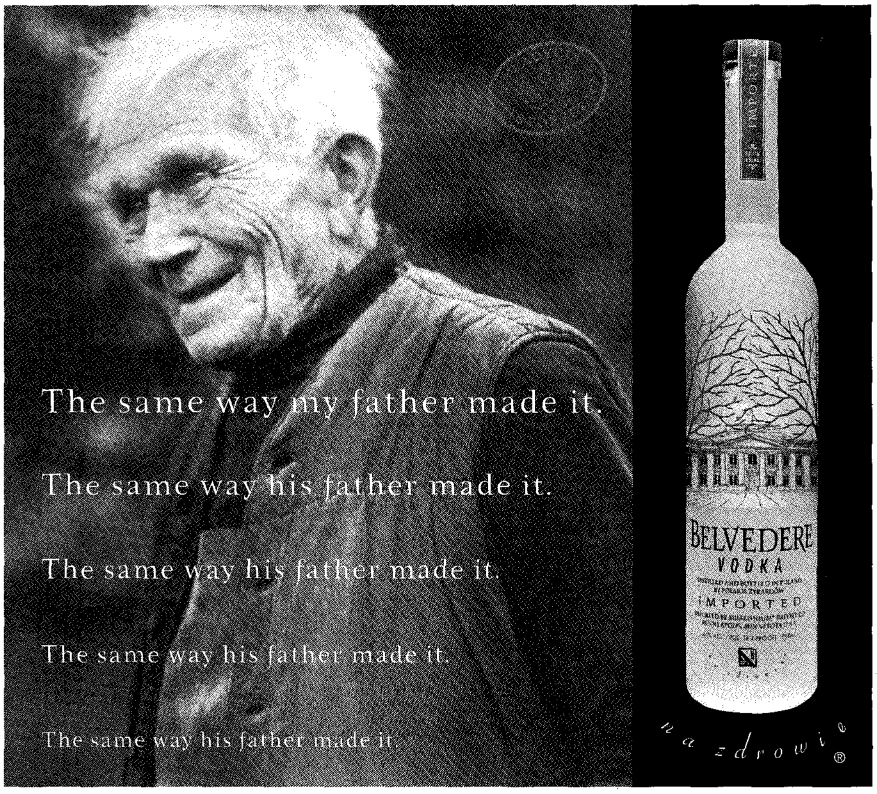
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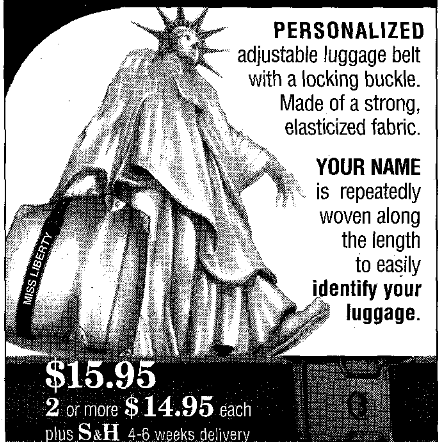

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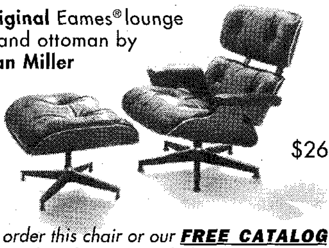

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ing nothing more than to settle in with his copy of the *Police Gazette* and have a peaceful afternoon at McSorley's. The Rookie's triumph over Ty Cobb, though, had bad consequences. Cobb developed a bitter, unappeasable Tom DeLay-type enmity toward the Rookie, and set himself the task of doing anything he could to destroy his career. John J. McGraw, thumbtack-sharp and demanding, and Christy Mathewson, handsome and deep-voiced and friendly, though a little remote—on a couple of occasions, when the Chief left town to go on a scouting trip to Cincinnati, he was the Rookie's babysitter—filled out the dramatis personae.

After a couple of months, I went down to the cellar of our building and got out the few baseball reference books I had brought to Paris and never unpacked. (This cellar is an honest-to-god *cave*, a stone cellar with little arches where you could keep wine; I kept meaning to bring the wine down, but I never remembered to do it, and, instead, the books were there, moldering away.) The 1908 National League pennant race, which I had plucked out of the air and dim memories of "The Glory of Their Times," turned out to be even more interesting than I'd thought. It was a three-way race—Cubs, Giants, Pirates—that included Merkle's boner and the season-capping rematch it produced, and, in a sense, it made baseball in America. I discovered that 1908 had been a kind of watershed year, a time when baseball had, for the last time, an air of improvisation about it, with, as someone said of those days, "stupid guys, smart guys, tough guys, mild guys, crazy guys, college men, slickers from the city, and hicks from the country." If a three-year-old with a major-league fastball had ever existed, 1908 would have been the right season for him to play, and they probably would have roomed him with an American Indian catcher.

I even found a wonderful photograph of the Polo Grounds in that magical year, and we hung it over Luke's bed. It shows a hundred or so fans lining up on Coogan's Bluff, overlooking the ballpark—too poor or, more likely, too cheap to buy tickets, since you can see that there are still a few seats left in center—backs turned and heads bowed as they stare down at the field. Every single one of the men (there are no women) is wearing a derby; the kids are wearing cloth caps. One kid and an elderly gent have got up on a barrel, and five men in suits and hats are standing, precarious but dignified, on a plank that slopes down from it. You can't really see a thing going on in the park—not a base line, not a ballplayer, not a glimpse of a dugout or a bullpen, nothing except the outfield grass down below, a perfect and absolute blank. It's as good as a Magritte: the solemnly dressed businessmen, backs turned, gazing out at the bare and uneventful field. Of course, Luke didn't have to be told who they were looking at down there, and why; we could both see it plain as day. They were watching the Rookie, pitching his way out of another pinch.

YET I began to wonder: what picture did he summon up when, night after night, he heard the words "Polo Grounds," "full count," "all the way to the backstop"? Not an inexact picture; no picture at all. He had never been to a baseball game, never seen a bat or a glove, never been inside a ballpark, or even watched a ballgame on television. He spent his days in parks where kids played soccer on dusty gravel, and you put a toe in the grass on pain of being whistled down by the *surveillant*, watching from his shed. No one Luke knew played baseball, no one talked about it; the words and situations were pure language, pure abstract lore. The clichés I rolled out: "He had all day," "steamy Sportsman's Park," "no foreign substances on the old pill"—what did he think, what did he see when he heard them? I knew that he wanted to hear the words as much as I needed to say them—he zipped through dessert to get to bed every night—but what did the words mean to him?

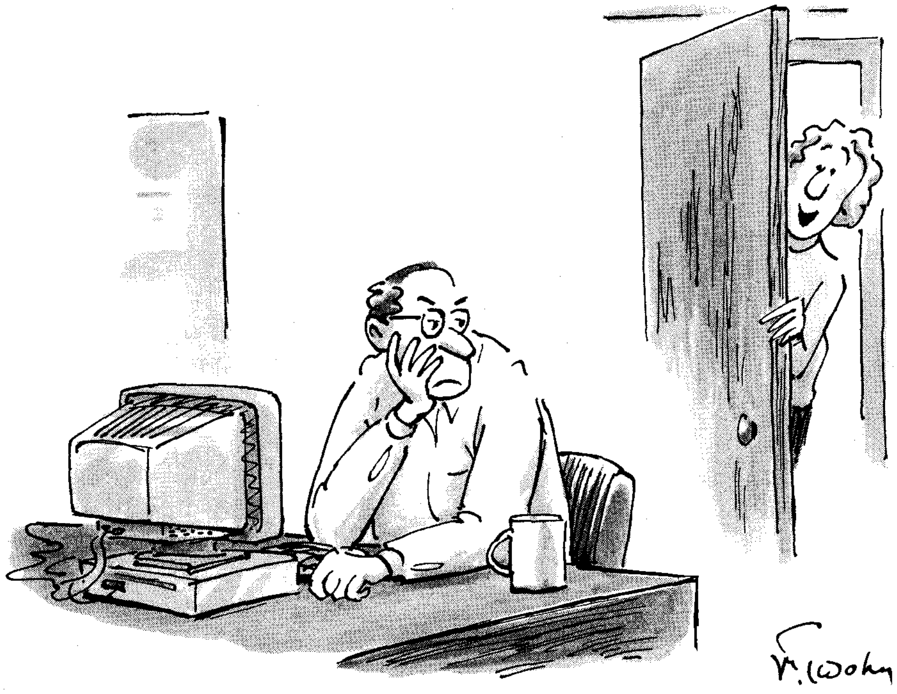
I had spent my adult life believing that storytelling depends on the credibility of its details, and now, finally, I had made up a story that someone liked, and the details had no credibility at all, no existence except as sounds. You are supposed to use a word, I had always been taught, to point at a thing, and hope that the thing will somehow end up pointing at a symbol: a feeling, a state of mind. When I lived in New York, I had on occasion even brought this faith to writing students. (Not that they cared. The fetching female ones listened gravely, and then came up after class to ask if I had Gary Fisketjohn's phone number.) But now I said "Polo Grounds" or "full count," and the words called up in my son a powerful reaction. What of that second range, where the words were supposed to become things, even just images in his head?

There is, I believe now, a force in stories, words in motion, that either drives them forward past things into feelings or doesn't. Sometimes the words fly right over the fence and all the way out to the feelings. Make them do it one time out of three in private and you've got a reputation as someone who can play a little, a dad who can tell a decent bedtime story. Do it three times out of three in public, and you're Mark McGwire, or Dickens.

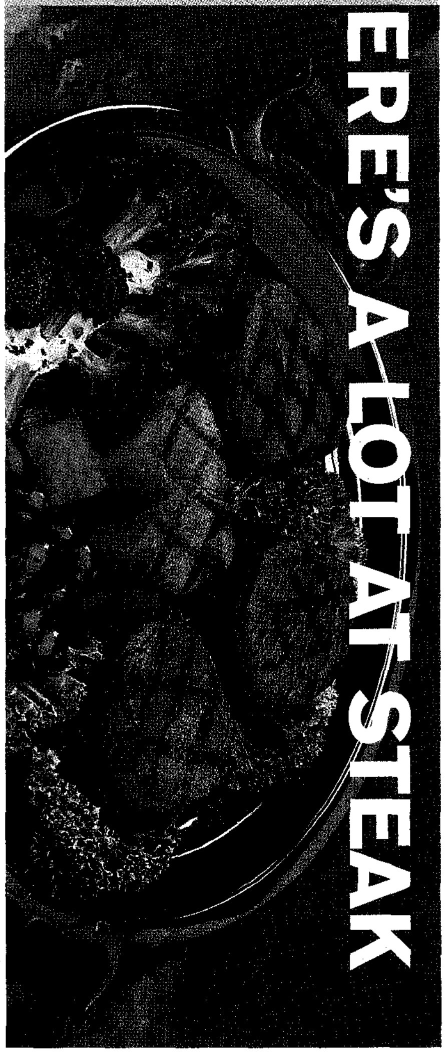
And I needed the words, too, just as words. After four years in Paris, I found that though I missed American sports a lot less than I had thought I would, I missed the lore of American sports keenly. I didn't really miss sports; I missed the sports pages. I didn't miss the things—sometimes the baseball season was twenty or twenty-five games old before I knew it had started—but I missed the words that went with the things. My passion for baseball, which at one point in my life was pretty intense, is now almost gone. My team, the Montreal Expos, is on the verge of going out of business; when I visit New York I no longer know, or can even guess, which player is wearing which cap.

I still care about the words, though. One day, shopping for dinner along the Rue du Bac and waiting in one of the interminable lines that are created by the individual care of French service—a line that is briskly, infuriatingly violated by the same arrogant dyed-blond woman in a fur coat and with a great jaw—I thought, Nobody *in this line* but me knows what an r.b.i. is, or who Gene Mauch was, or what Jarry Park used to look like, or what a twi-night doubleheader is. And I felt yearningly, unappeasably homesick. (This was not a rational emotion, since I have lived for years with a woman who doesn't know what an r.b.i. is, either.)

The things an American who is abroad for a very long time misses, I was discovering—or, at least, the things I missed—weren't the things you were supposed to miss. We are supposed to come to Europe for leisure, sunshine, a more civilized pace, for slowness of various kinds. America we are supposed to miss for its speed, its friendliness—for the independence of its people and the individualism of their lives. Yet these were not the things I missed, and when I speak to Americans who have lived abroad for a long time those are not the things they seem to miss, either. I didn't miss crosstown traffic, New York taxicabs, talk radio or talk television, or the constant, appalling flow of opinion which spills out like dirty floodwater.



"Any intellectual property yet, honey?"



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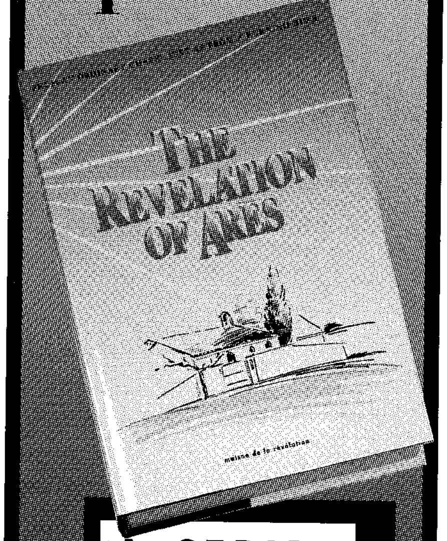

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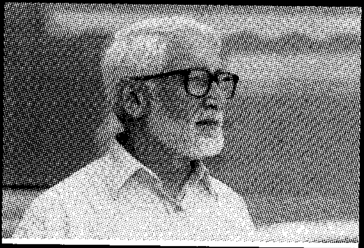

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(Paris is an argumentative but not an opinionated city; it is the ideal of every French newspaper columnist to have premises so inarguable that the opinions can more or less look after themselves while he goes to lunch.)

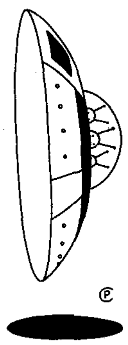
I didn't miss American "independence," either. If anything, I missed its opposite, American obsequiousness, that yearning, beseeching tone of a salesman trying to sell something which you never hear in statist Europe. (The French, I think somebody said, have every vice except obsequiousness.) Buying shoes for my son, I missed the shoe salesmen of my childhood, my own uncles among them: their glasses held together with tape, their voices keening as they got down on their knees to tie the laces and make the sale. "Now, the youngster can wear this shoe as a sports shoe or a dress shoe. Yeah, you got plenty of room there at the toe, young fellow—stand up. Now, show your mom these shoes. Walk around." Quieter: "I have it in burgundy, in brown, in blue. . . ." A French shoe salesman, indignant at his position, laces the child's shoes in silent anger and rises to his feet pretty much shaking his fist in your face.

I found, to my surprise, that what I missed and longed for was the comforting loneliness of life in New York, a certain kind of scuffed-up soulfulness. In Paris, no relationship, even one with a postman or a dry cleaner, is abstract or anonymous: human relations are carved out in a perpetual present tense. There's an intricacy of debits and credits. Things have histories. The little, quickly forgiven bumps of New York social life—the missed phone calls, the suddenly cancelled lunches, the early exit from the dinner party, which are, if anything, signs of status, of "busyness"—are sources of long grievances, permanent estrangements, endless reëxplanations. It isn't possible just to remove yourself from a friendship in Paris for a month or two, as you can in New York. ("What have you been doing?" "Working." "Oh.") Even the most apparently professional relationships get overloaded. The dry cleaner is recovering from cancer, and her visits to pick up the clothes are scheduled around her treatments, with enough time to talk about them; the man who puts up shelves is a jazz guitarist, and an extra hour must be budgeted in to trade licks and discuss Jim Hall. On your way down the street in the early morning to run with all the other Americans in the Luxembourg Gardens—only Americans and French riot police go running; the Americans you know by their music-festival sweatshirts, the French police by their flattop cuts and thoughtful, coiled power—you hear footsteps coming after you, and you worry that you have violated some ordinance, stepped on some forbidden grass. It is the fishmonger. "The wild salmon went well?" he demands anxiously. You find a café where you feel at home—and then become reluctant to go there, since it will involve such a wearing round of handshakes and "How is Madame?"

New York is devoted to the cult of busyness, but, like all cults, it has at its heart the worship of a single, unforgiving idol—The Office. After the idol has been served, life can be pretty formless. The things Americans miss tend to involve that kind of formlessness, small, casual, and solitary pleasures. A psychoanalyst misses walking up Lafayette Street in her tracksuit, sipping coffee from a Styrofoam cup with the little plastic piece that pops up. My wife, having been sent the carrot cake that she missed from New York, discovered that what she really missed was standing up at the counter and eating carrot cake in the company of strangers at the Bon Vivant coffee shop. I thought I missed reading Phil Mushnick in the sports pages of the *Post;* when I read him on-line, I discovered that what I really missed was reading Phil Mushnick on the No. 6 uptown on a Monday morning around ten.

It was, in a way, the invisibility of the men up on Coogan's Bluff in 1908 that drew me to them. The consensual anonymity of men in crowds is what we are escaping when we leave, and then it is what we miss. You can be alone in Paris a lot, but it is hard to be lonely: there is always another pair of eyes, not unfriendly, appraising you. (The French husband of an American friend will not meet her in the park in his tennis shorts. He does not know who will see him, but he is sure that he will, in some way, be seen.) You are a subject, not an object, and if this is part of the narrow, centuries-old happiness of life in Paris it is also one of the things that narrow that happiness. Walk into Central Park to watch the sea lions and you disappear from the world for a little while. In the Luxembourg Gardens, or at the menagerie in the Jardin des Plantes, you are always conscious of the long allées leading you back the way you came; of the *surveillant's* shed at the center of the park, where the two uniformed men sit with their hot plate, warming up coffee and watching the world; of the lion looking back at you. We go to cities to be invisible, or to be invisible and visible by turns, and it is hard to be invisible in Paris. The light at night is too strong. Gershwin got this right, at least: the car horns and the syncopations in "An American in Paris" are all French. What that American misses is the blues.

AFTER about a year of telling the Rookie story, I went to New York to give a talk, and I turned the trip into a literary mission—a sort of Rookie collecting expedition. I wanted to bring home tangible evidence of something that, as a matter of fact, had never taken place there. I bought a baseball encyclopedia and a box of books on the Cobb era, and borrowed a Ken Burns video. A vintage Giants cap, child-size, which I thought would be the hardest thing to find, turned out to be absurdly easy: the past is so neatly packaged now that I just walked into a memorabilia store on Lexington Avenue and found a replica cap, no problem.



When I got home, I put on the video, from the PBS "Baseball" series, which I had never seen, and we watched all those flickering, overfrantic little ghost figures racing around. One by one, the faces and bodies and actions that you couldn't see in the photo above Luke's bed were being filled in. There was Ty Cobb, looking appropriately evil, there was John J. McGraw. There was pitching and batting (I realized, from Luke's comments, that he had them the wrong way around). There was baserunning.

And there was Christy Mathewson, and then a picture of Matty, handsome and assured as ever, slowly dissolving into a picture of a small, serious boy with blond bangs, wearing a baseball cap and a perfectly sober expression, going into a pitching windup. I still have no idea who he actually was (it's not Christy Mathewson's kid; I've found a picture of him, and he had darker hair) but, of course, Luke knew, perfectly well.

"There he is," he said. "Rewind it." We watched Matty and the Rookie appear again, and then he told me to turn it off. He was uncharacteristically silent for the rest of the afternoon, but before dinner I heard him talking to his mother in the bath. "He had his hands up like this," he was saying chattily. "I don't know why."

SOMETIME that month, I began to think that it was time to round off the Rookie story, give it a suitably grand ending, turn the legend into a myth; I would find another story. I was having a hard time thinking of new plots, and, anyway, it had been two years.

It was, at last, the seventh game of the 1908 World Series. The Rookie had

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resembling now an intricate map of suburban roads and driveways,
now a star.
                                   On the wing, the paint
blisters in gunmetal eczema.

Unbolted, my heart
is a missile
heading, in every sense, in the wrong direction.

—Rosanna Warren

started three for the Giants, Matty the others. (Of course, we had made the Giants, not the Cubs, grab the gonfalon on the final day.) It was the bottom of the ninth, the score tied one to one on homers by the Chief and Sam Crawford. Cobb was up. He dragged a bunt and headed for first, and this time he didn't just spike the Rookie; he actually slid into first base, razor-clad feet up. Hit hard, the Rookie held on to the ball. But the Umpire ruled that the ball had rolled foul down the first-base line. The Rookie was bleeding, fed up, homesick, crowded by a ringer like Gizmo McGee, a Tiger midget pretending to be a four-year-old—and he had endured a full season (in two years) of cruel torment at the hands of this terrible man. And so he did an awful thing: he loaded up and threw his best fastball right at Ty Cobb's head—threw so hard that Cobb's head came right off, popped up high, before settling back down, with a surprised look, on his shoulders.

Umpire Bill Klem checked out Cobb—he was O.K.; the Rookie knew what he was doing—and then looked at the Rookie. "You're outta here, Rookie," he said, giving him the longest, slowest, saddest thumbing heave-ho that the major leagues have ever seen. "There's just no throwing at people in baseball." The crowd sat silent, disbelieving. The Rookie, head bowed, walked off the field.

And (I said) he kept walking. The Chief and Matty and Mr. McGraw were waiting for him in the dugout, but he walked away from them, didn't even stop to take off his uniform in the center-field clubhouse, just kept walking, right out of the Polo Grounds, day after day, week after week, until he was back in Anywhere, U.S.A., still in his uniform. His mother didn't ask any questions. She hugged him, helped him out of his uniform (she hung it in the closet) and asked him if he wanted something to eat, and the next day he went back to school. His legend grew, but he never picked up a ball again.

Luke sat up. "He did not go home to his mother," he said clearly. I felt horrible, as evil as Ty Cobb. I saw in his eyes what seemed to me not anger, exactly, but something more like doubt, religious doubt as it is described in nineteenth-century novels. What if the Rookie hadn't risen again? What if the story had been only a story? What if someone was obviously manipulating it for a moral purpose? He had the relics and the photos, but, like

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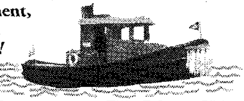

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a true believer, he knew that it was all just talk if the Rookie didn't rise again.

"He did not go home to his mother," he said again, and, as quickly as I could, in a panic, I turned it around. Of course not, I said. He went home for that day, to relax. The next day, a delegation from both leagues was in his front yard, insisting that he come back to the Giants. "Baseball can't survive without you, kid," said Ban Johnson, president of the American League. Even Cobb himself, bandaged and sheepish, was there. Finally, the Rookie agreed to come back—"But no more dirty tricks," he said—and they played an eighth game (as they'd done once before), which he won.

"You told the story wrong," he said finally. (And the next day he said to his mother, "Daddy told the Rookie story wrong.") So the story goes on, only now it is much more under the child's control. The Rookie soon entered a Gothick phase, as the little boy began to demand scary Rookie stories ("With a real witch. Not Ty Cobb dressed up like a witch. Not the Chief dressed up like a witch. A real witch"), and, more recently, a decadent phase. The current story, for instance, involves Sherlock Holmes, the genie from "Aladdin," a T. rex, and the Pirate King from "Pirates of Penzance." Having been, if only momentarily, betrayed by the story, he was doing what the literary critics would call "contesting the narrative." The story belongs to him now.

My Rookie never really played ball again, no matter how many stories I tell, any more than Sherlock Holmes really came back alive from the Reichenbach Falls, no matter how many stories Conan Doyle wrote about him afterward. I think the Rookie just went home to Anywhere, U.S.A., and back to school like all the other kids.

Luke and I tried playing a little catch this spring in the Luxembourg Gardens but gave up after about five minutes. For a present, around that time, he asked us to make him his own *carte d'identité*, marked with a *métier de journaliste*—a press pass from the government—so that he could pretend to cut through red tape. We made him an impressive-looking fake government document, with a black-and-white photo and lots of cryptic, official-looking stamps. At bedtime now before the Rookie story starts, he likes to act out a French bureaucratic drama: I play a functionary guarding an entrance to something or other who scowls at him until he haughtily flashes his *carte*, and then I let him pass with many apologetic, ah-Monsieur-I-did-not-recognize grimaces and shrugs, while his mother acts out the role of irate bystander, fuming in line while the privileged functionary serenely passes by. I suppose it is about time we took him home.

I don't think about the Rookie as much as I used to, but when the bombs began to fall in Serbia last March I began thinking about that other Serbian conflagration, in 1914, and everything it had led to, and I realized with a start that by making the Rookie three years old in 1908 I was leaving him, unprotected, to the century's horrors. Then I did a quick calculation and realized that he would have been far too young for the first war, and just too old for the second. The Rookie was lucky that way, I think. ♦

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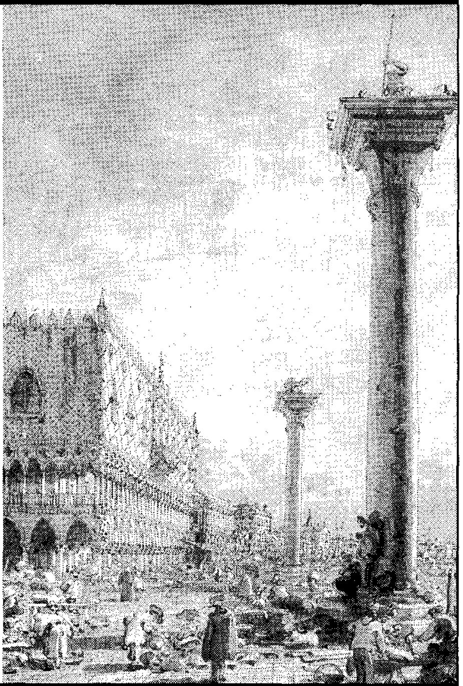

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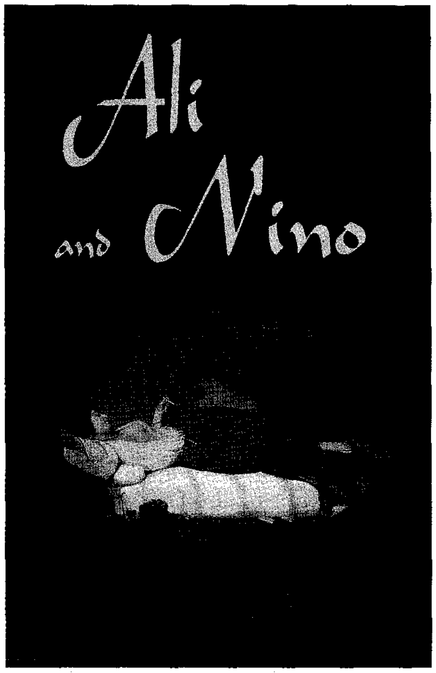
A REPORTER AT LARGE

THE MAN FROM THE EAST

Was the author of a classic romantic novel set on the eve of the Russian Revolution a Jewish intellectual, a Caucasian warrior, an Islamic devotee, or a café-society dilettante? And why was his identity a secret for so long?

BY TOM REISS

On a cold November morning in Vienna, I walked a maze of narrow streets on the way to see a man who promised to solve the mystery of Kurban Said. I was with Peter Mayer, the president of the Overlook Press, a large, rumpled figure in a black corduroy suit, who wanted to publish Said's small romantic novel "Ali and Nino." Mayer tended to burst into enthusiastic monologues about the book: "You know how when you look at a Vermeer, and it's an interior, and it's quite quiet, yet somehow, what he does with perspective, with light, it feels much bigger—that's this novel!" A love story set in the Caucasus on the eve of the Russian Revolution, "Ali and Nino" had originally been published in German in 1937, and had been revived by Random House, in translation, as a minor classic in the seventies. But it had gone out of print, and the question of the author's identity had never been resolved. All anyone agreed on was that Kurban Said was the pen name of a writer who had probably come from the Azerbaijani capital, Baku, an oil city in the Transcaucasus, and that he was either a nationalist poet who was killed in the Gulags, or the dilettante son of an oil millionaire, or a Viennese café-society writer who died in Italy, in 1942, after stabbing himself in the foot. In one of the strangest jacket photographs I have ever seen, on a book called "Twelve Secrets of the Caucasus," the mysterious author is dressed up as a Caucasian warrior—wearing a fur cap, a long flowing coat with a traditional sewn-in bandolier, and a straight dagger at his waist.



The young Lev Nussimbaum in Baku, top; an unreleased edition of the contested novel; Essad Bey in Berlin in the nineteen-twenties.

TOP: COURTESY JENIA GRAMAN; OPPOSITE: COURTESY NORMA BRAILOW

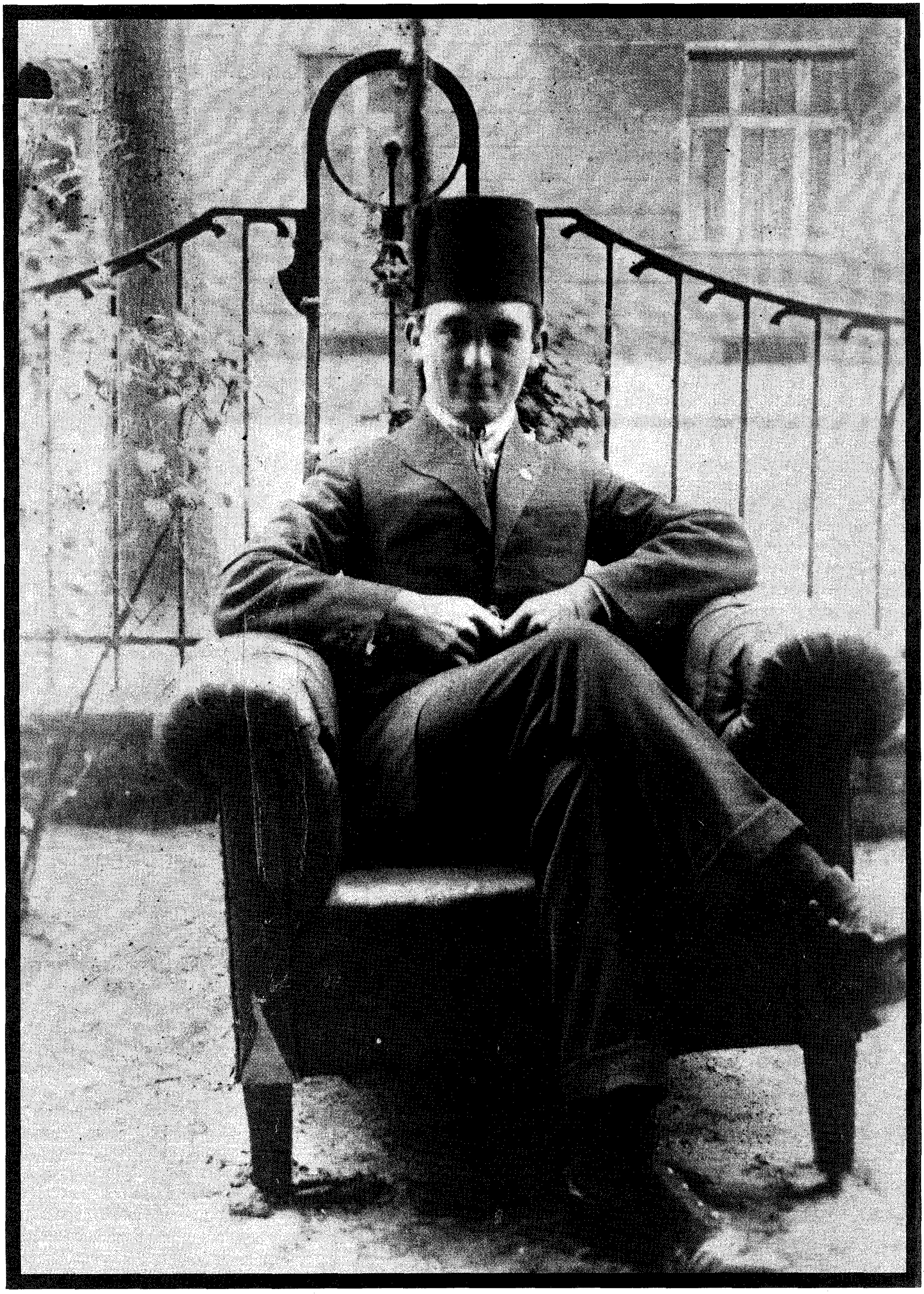
Mayer and I were on our way to a meeting with a lawyer named Heinz Barazon, who was challenging Overlook over proper author credit on the novel. Barazon claimed to know the true identity of Kurban Said, and, as the lawyer for the author's heirs, he was insisting that it be explained in the new edition of "Ali and Nino" or he would block publication. At the lawyer's address, next to a shop where some old women were bent over tables with needle and thread, we were buzzed into a lobby that could have had the grime of the Anschluss on its fixtures. Mayer squeezed my arm with excitement and said, "It's 'The Third Man'!" Barazon's appearance didn't do anything to dispel the atmosphere of a Cold War thriller. He was a small man with a gravelly voice, a stooped back, and a club foot. "You have both come a long way to discover the identity of Kurban Said," he said as he led us down a book-lined hallway. "It will soon all become clear to you." He ushered us into a room where a gaunt and beautiful blond woman with enormous glassy eyes was lying motionless on a couch. "Pardon me, this is Leela Ehrenfels," said Barazon.

"I hope you'll forgive me," Leela said in a fragile, precise voice. "I must remain lying down because I'm ill. I can't sit for very long."

Barazon came directly to the point: the novel "Ali and Nino" was written by the Baroness Elfriede Ehrenfels von Bodmershof, the second wife of Leela's father, and when she died, in the early nineteen-eighties, all rights to the work had passed down to Leela.

Barazon produced a thick file of documents that backed up this story: publishing contracts, legal papers, and author lists from the late thirties, stamped with Nazi eagles and swastikas. Under the entry for "Said, Kurban" in the author's section of the 1935-39 "Deutscher Gesamtkatalog"—the Third Reich's equivalent of Books in Print—it said, in no uncertain terms, "pseudonym for Ehrenfels, v. Bodmershof, Elfriede, Baroness."

The Nazi documents seemed to tell



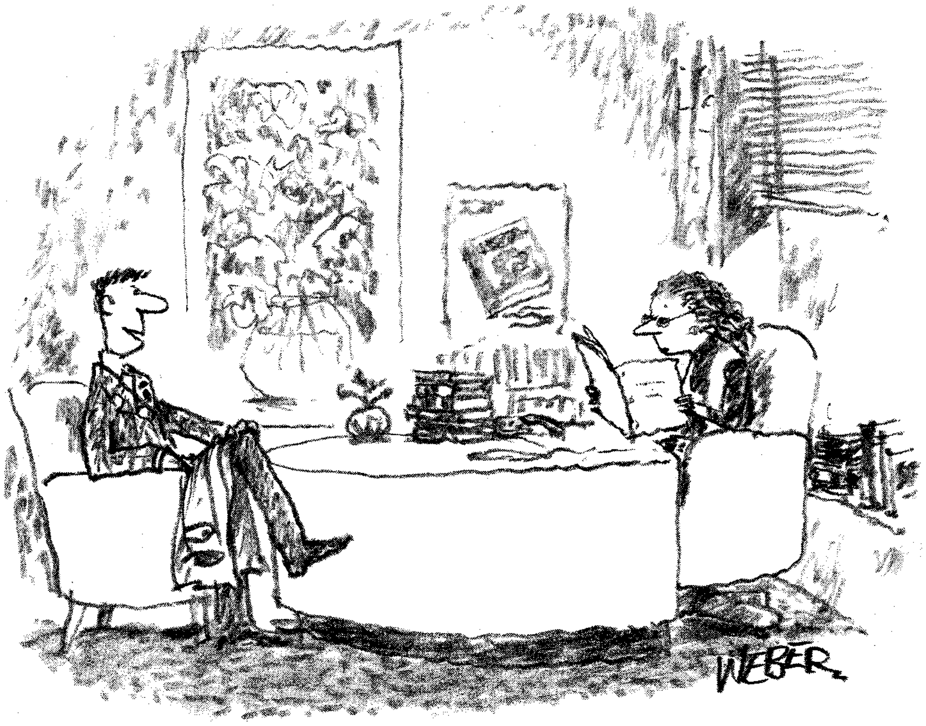
a clear story—that Baroness Elfriede had been Kurban Said—but one that I believed to be untrue.

I HAD become interested in the identity of Kurban Said the previous spring, while I was in Baku, where I had gone to research a story on the region's oil boom. An Iranian friend had recommended "Ali and Nino" as a kind of introduction to the southern Caucasus, saying that it was more useful than any tourist guide. But when I tracked down a 1972 Pocket Books edition of the novel I was a little surprised by the cover, which featured two airbrushed lovers and, just below the title, an endorsement from *Life:* "If Kurban Said can't push Erich Segal off the bestseller list, nobody can!" The novel is slender and fast-paced, and evokes the vibrant cultural mosaic of turn-of-the-century Baku. ("Ali is a young man, proud as a lion, from an old and honored Moslem family. . . . Nino is the protected but willful daughter of a rich Christian merchant," proclaimed the back cover.) There was also something of the eighteenth century about the book, as if "Candide" had been written with realistic characters and the intention of sweeping readers off their feet. Each scene continues only long enough to spring some miniature gear that moves the mechanism forward. When the Random House edition came out, the *Times* reviewer—referring to the novel's "subtle charm" and "spun-glass irony"—wrote, "One feels as if one has dug up buried treasure."

As the romantic tale unfolds, issues of East and West, European and Muslim, tradition and modernity remain at the center of it. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Caucasus resisted the pull of the Russian Empire and was a stubborn source of Islamic revolution and tribalism; by 1900, it had made an uneasy peace with its tsarist colonizers, and cosmopolitan Baku was one of Moscow's key outposts. (Indeed, the rift between Russia and the Caucasus is still the most violent crisis in the region.) Around 1917, amid growing instability in Baku, Ali attends a rally where the speakers talk of Caucasian political and religious independence. Some in the crowd have a more radical solution in mind:

> Assadullah came across the hall and sat down next to me: "And what do you think, Ali Khan?" Without waiting for an answer he bent forward and whispered: "Wouldn't it be wonderful to kill all Russians in our country? And not only the Russians—kill all these foreigners who talk and pray and think differently from us. We all want to do that, really, but I'm the only one who dares to say it aloud. . . . We must exterminate all foreigners." He spoke the word "exterminate" with such tender longing, as if it meant "love."

Kurban Said seems to believe that, while blood feud is an Asiatic tradition, genocide is a European import, like machine guns. (When Ali first sees one, he thinks its small muzzle looks "like a Russian nose, snub and broad.") By the final scene, the main characters are all wielding machine guns, and Ali is feeding bullets into his "as if they were rosary beads." Finally, he has chosen to sacrifice love—he allows himself to be separated from Nino and their newborn child—for ethnic pride and honor.



"Yep, that's it—seven pages. I only write what I know."

References to "Ali and Nino" cropped up again and again during my stay in Baku. Educated Azeris whom I met seemed to consider it their national novel, telling me that they could show me the street, square, or schoolhouse where almost every scene had taken place. Filmmakers from abroad, hoping to make a feature of the book, had set up their headquarters in the mansion of a pre-Revolutionary oil baron. In the gift shop of Baku's Hyatt Regency Hotel, the single book for sale in English—on its cover a photograph of an antique Caspian gusher and a bunch of oilmen in fur hats—offered a little more information about who Kurban Said might be. The book was "Blood and Oil in the Orient," by "the author of 'Ali & Nino' "—whose name was given in big black letters as "Essad-Bey" and beneath that, in parentheses, as "Lev Naussimbaum." A foreword by an Azeri scholar attempted to clarify matters:

> Essad-Bey . . . converted to Judaism and chose the name Lev Naussimbaum. . . . He then moves on to Berlin where he joins a circle of German intellectuals. In the early thirties, he travels to Vienna. Eventually, he publishes his beautiful novel, "Ali and Nino," under the pseudonym of Kurban Said. . . . In 1938 he tried to escape the German onslaught. Soon he was arrested and moved to Italy. There, in 1942, he stabbed himself in the foot and died of this self-inflicted wound.

I doubted that anyone would convert to Judaism just before moving to Germany in the late nineteen-twenties. Still, "Ali and Nino" shared many incidents and details with the oil book, which suggested some link between this Essad Bey and Kurban Said.

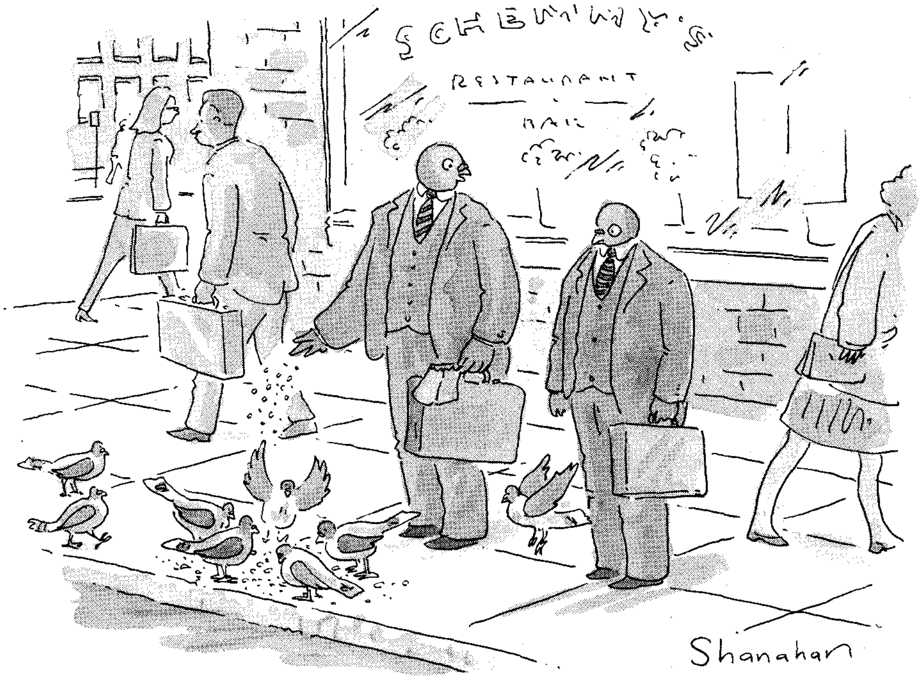
Before I left Baku, I paid a visit to two sisters named Sarah and Miriam Ashurbely, aged ninety-two and ninety-four, who were among the only surviving children of the region's tsarist-era oil millionaires. They showed me stacks of dusty photographs—men in fezzes and evening dress on the way to the opera, camels walking alongside Rolls-Royces—and they described the wide circle of friends their parents entertained at home, when Christians, Muslims, and Jews, all the children of the capitalist set, mixed at banquets, games, and lavish parties.

The Ashurbelys brought out a final picture, a group photo of their last Christmas party, on the eve of the Great War. Sarah's bony finger pointed to the tiny faces as the sisters recalled the names, nationalities, and religions of every child in the room and what had happened to each of them after the war and the invasion of the Soviet Army: a girl in a Gypsy headdress, a boy in a tightly buttoned velvet suit, and, seated in the middle, a little boy with big ears, a round face, and a rather arrogant expression.

"That was little Lev Nussimbaum," Sarah said. Her sister nodded and smiled, remembering. "He was a Jewish boy about two years our junior."

Really? I asked. Are you sure the name was Lev Nussimbaum? Exactly that name?

"Yes, Lev, little Lev Nussimbaum. He was the smartest of all the children, a very smart little Jewish boy whose father was a rich businessman in town. He never had a mother, and the family tried to compensate for this. He was a very nice and a very well-mannered boy, and since his earliest childhood he was fluent in German. He left Baku, and we heard later he died in Italy."



"Never forget where you came from, son."

• •

As it turned out, at the meeting in Vienna, Heinz Barazon and Leela Ehrenfels were well aware of Lev Nussimbaum. It seemed that Leela's father, Rolf von Ehrenfels, had become friends with him in the early nineteen-thirties in Vienna, by which time he was using the name Essad Bey—"Bey" being a standard Ottoman honorific, and "Essad" derived from the Turkish version of Lev, or Leo ("lion"). Rolf's wife, Baroness Elfriede, also got to know Essad, and Barazon conceded that he may have supplied some of the details that had helped the Baroness, who had never been to the Caucasus, re-create the atmosphere of prewar Baku in "Ali and Nino." But it had primarily been her work.

Barazon showed us a contract, dated April 20, 1937, between the publishing firm E. P. Tal, of Vienna, and Baroness Elfriede Ehrenfels-Bodmershof, for a book called "Der Sterbende Orient," or "The Dying Orient." (He explained that this had been the working title for "Ali and Nino.") Another document announced the sale of the Czech rights to the novel, now referred to as "Ali and Nino," on June 7, 1938. While the first contract was signed by the company's owner in a feminine hand—"Tal"—beneath the traditional close *"Hochachtungsvoll"* ("With great respect"), the second was signed by someone else, a certain Alfred Ibach, beneath the Nazi-era greeting *"Mit deutschem Gruss,"* a milder way of saying "Heil Hitler!" Barazon explained that this Alfred Ibach had been the "Aryanizer" of the Tal firm, the Gentile who took it over from its Jewish owner, Lucy Tal.

I wondered aloud whether Elfriede couldn't have, in a sense, been the Aryanizer of Kurban Said, taking over this pen name from Essad Bey because the latter was actually Lev Nussimbaum, a Jew. She could have been doing it as a favor to her friend, much as some nonwriters "fronted" for writers with Communist pasts in the McCarthy era. Leela seemed visibly distressed by the suggestion, and Barazon hastened to point out that because the contracts were first signed in the spring of 1937, almost a full year before the Nazis marched into Austria, there would have been no reason to Aryanize Kurban Said. When Leela excused herself from the room briefly, Barazon whispered to us that by 1936 the marriage between Elfriede and Baron Rolf, Leela's father, was kaput, and he suspected that Elfriede had had an affair with Essad Bey and that "Kurban Said" had grown out of this romantic relationship.

As the meeting progressed, Mayer agreed to let Barazon write an introduction to "Ali and Nino," giving the Ehrenfels family's version of the "real" Kurban Said; in turn, Barazon and Leela agreed not to stand in the way of Mayer's plans. (This arrangement resulted in the book's republication this month by Overlook, with jacket copy written by Barazon and a cover design by Milton Glaser.) Both men seemed happy, and we adjourned to a nearby beer hall for lunch, where Barazon lectured us about the history of the Austro-Hungarian bureaucracy and Leela looked on like a misplaced character from Proust. At one point she described to me a device she used to "whirl" her tap water, which was necessary because we were all being weakened by the effects of drinking water that was not in its natural, whirling state. I asked her more about her father—in the mid-twenties, Barazon had explained, Rolf changed his name to Omar and converted to Islam—and about his friendship with Essad Bey. "I think you should speak with my mother—she knows much more about Essad Bey and my father and Aunt Elfriede than I do," she said. "But I should warn you, she's a slightly unusual person."

Baron Omar-Rolf von Ehrenfels; Mike Nichols, Zhenia Voronov, Adia Voronov, Essad Bey, and Tossia Peschkowsky; a page from

LEFT AND FAR RIGHT: COURTESY BARONESS MIREILLE VON EHRENFELS-ABEILLE; COURTESY NORMA BRAILOW; COURTESY FRAU THERESE MÖGLE

LEELA'S mother, the Baron's third wife, lived in the Waldviertel, the "woods region" of Austria, an inhospitable little corner of the country near the Czech border. Leela had said that, because her mother was quite reclusive and kept an odd schedule, one had to spend the night at her castle, Schloss Lichtenau, if one was really going to interview her. Besides, there were a great many documents up there that I might find of interest. I was late leaving Vienna, and the castle was lit by early moonlight when I drove up, making the high stone walls appear magical against the ice-blue twilight. I opened the gate and walked in. "Good evening!" I shouted a few times into the darkness, but when there was no reply I went back down to the village to find a phone. The people in the inn I went to looked at me the way people drinking beer in the middle of absolute nowhere will, but someone dialled the number, and, after a couple of rings, a bubbly French accent sang out, "But where are you? I have been *waaait*-ing for hours!"

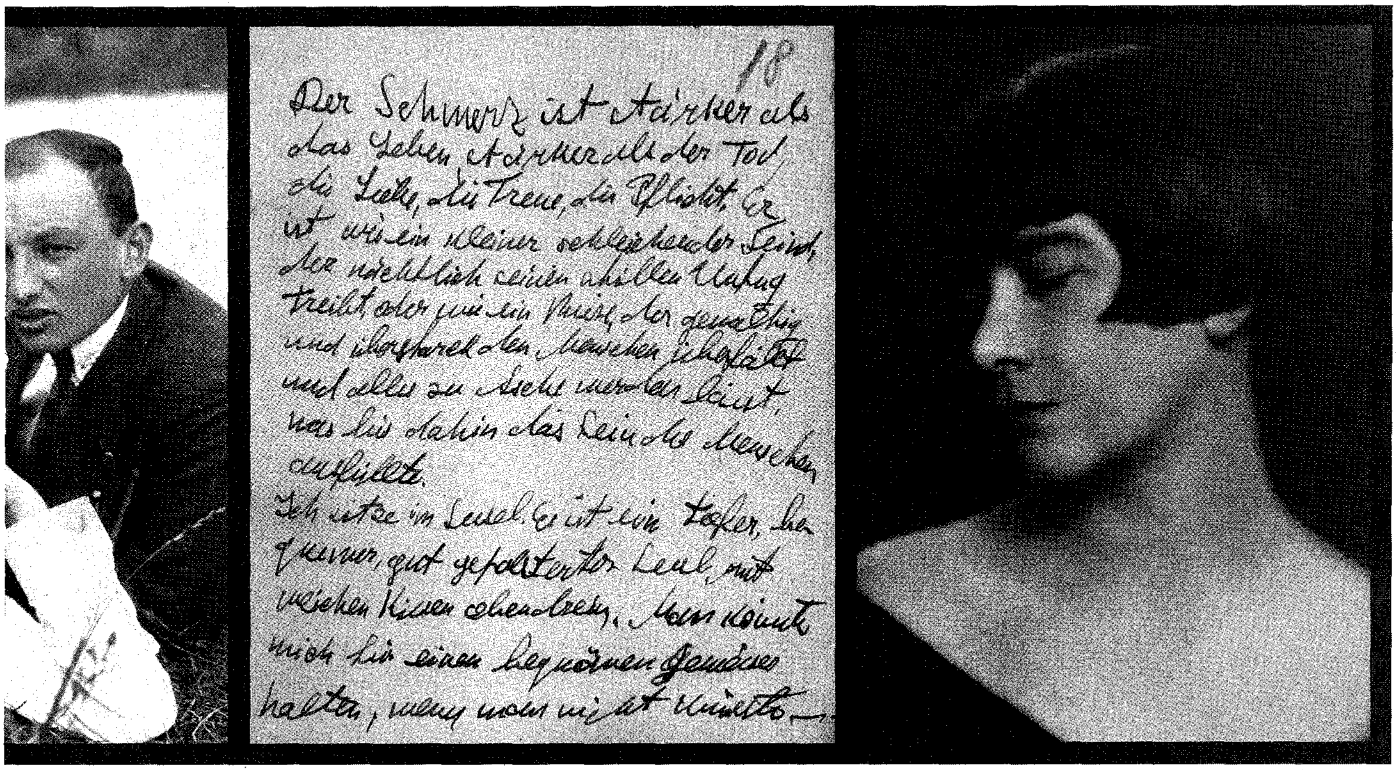
Fifteen minutes later, the Baroness, a robust woman with brown eyes and a mass of white hair, was showing me around the dank stone passageways of Schloss Lichtenau. Through a heavy wooden door, we entered a room that was at least three centuries farther along in cultural evolution than the hallways. It had Oriental carpets, a pianoforte, and a ceiling-high ceramic stove, not to mention a fax machine. The Baroness offered me a bit of cheese, with many apologies that the lady who cooked for her had "not shown up in days," and escorted me to a small set of rooms done up like a cell in a very elegant Renaissance cloister. She asked me if I could "survive here" and excused herself in a flurry. It was 7 P.M., she said, long past her bedtime.

Five hours later, just past midnight, I was woken up by the tinny sounds of a rock opera echoing through the castle. The source of the sound was on the other side of the grand salon. I heard mild cursing and muttering in French behind a door, along with what sounded like a Central European version of "Miss Saigon," and then, "Ah-ha? Ah-ha! Ahh-haaaa!" I knocked. The music suddenly stopped, and the French voice called out, "*Entrez.*" The Baroness was sitting up on her bed surrounded by piles of sheet music. On a carved oak chest next to the bed sat a battered silver boom box. She looked up at me and said, "Do you know something about musicals?" I asked her what she meant. "Have you seen one?" I said of course I had seen one, but not in a long time. "I have never seen one," she said, full of genuine anguish. "But I am fascinated! Absolutely fascinated!" She explained that she was writing the French text for a rock musical being put on by an Israeli-German team from Frankfurt; she had fallen in love with their work and insisted on getting involved with the production. The problem, she said, was that she had never seen a musical. "How could I? I never had time. I was either in India or fixing up the castle here." At her request, I found myself singing bits of "On the Town," "Singing in the Rain," and "Camelot" to give her some idea of what musicals sounded like.

The Baroness explained that she always awoke and began her workday at midnight, and that usually she insisted on not being disturbed until well after 6 A.M., but since I had come all this way to find out about her husband and Elfriede and Essad Bey she would talk with me about it at 4 A.M. Until then, however, she had to concentrate. So I left her with her music and went back to my cell.

The Baroness came into my room sometime just before dawn, the peaked window by the desk still black except for a few icicles. We had tea and cheese for breakfast, and she began to tell me about how her husband and Elfriede became absorbed in the East. "They were called the Band of Four," she began, referring to Baron Omar-Rolf; his sister Imma; his second wife, Elfriede (a.k.a. Kurban Said); and Elfriede's brother Wilhelm. The relationships were hard to pin down, but basically a brother and a sister born von Ehrenfels (Rolf and Imma) had married a brother and a sister born von Bodmershof (Willi and Elfriede), so that Imma and Elfriede essentially exchanged last names. They'd all grown up in ancestral castles in the Waldviertel and in Prague, when it was still a Hapsburg city. In the Great War, Willi saw action on the eastern front and was wounded seven times, which may have been why he got so stuck on a German guru named Bo Yin Ra, a stern teacher of Eastern mysticism, and then persuaded all the others to become acolytes as well. It was not only the younger generation at the castle who became obsessed with the East. Rolf's mother, Emma, actually wrote an open letter to Hermann Hesse, printed in the *Neue Freie Presse*, asking for advice: "I wanted to write you . . . dear Meister, for not only did I encounter in your 'book'—as we refer to it in this world of sign-language—many a dear old friend, but the two of us must have encountered one another as well. When in the deep solitude of the forest, with my philosopher/life-partner, who had become emotionally disturbed over the war . . . was it not you who passed and gave the both of us a brief, warm handshake?" While other Austrians were finding their answers on the extreme left or right, this singular family in the Waldviertel looked to the Orient.

Rolf's father, Christian von Ehrenfels, had been a prominent philosopher, a founder of the Gestalt theory of psychology, and a correspondent of Freud's. But he had also been part of the anti-Semitic circle around Cosima Wagner in Bayreuth, and had developed some unique ideas about racial engineering. His pet peeve was that some of the best men in a race were its soldiers; hence the finest genetic stock was lost in battle. His solution was that brave soldiers returning from the front should have sexual access to as many women as possible. Largely because of such ideas, he never became a household name, but he was a beloved professor at the German university in Prague. "Kafka wrote in one of his diaries that he'd enjoyed attending Ehrenfels' class," recalled the Baroness, "and Kafka said it was particularly amusing when Ehrenfels said that one of the best things you can have is a few drops of Jewish blood." This had apparently been a great plus for the family's de-Nazification when they'd found mention of it somewhere in the writer's papers. Old Christian von Ehrenfels may have been an insane racialist, but he hadn't been an anti-Semite.



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Der Schmerz ist stärker als
das Leben, stärker als der Tod,
die Liebe, die Treue, die Pflicht. Er
ist wie ein kleiner schleichender Feind,
der nächtlich seinen stillen Umzug
treibt, oder wie ein Brand, der gewaltig
und überraschend den Menschen überfällt
und alles zu Asche werden lässt,
was bis dahin das Sein des Menschen
ausfüllte.
Ich sitze im Sessel. Es ist ein tiefer, be-
quemer, gut gepolsterter Sessel, mit
weichen Kissen überladen. Man könnte
mich für einen bequemen Geniesser
halten, wenn man nicht wüsste —

Kurban Said's last, unfinished novel; Baroness Elfriede Ehrenfels, whom Nazi documents identify as the author of "Ali and Nino."

Elfriede and Rolf married, the Baroness thought, mostly in order to keep the Band of Four together, but by the late nineteen-thirties the marriage had broken apart. During the war, Omar-Rolf went to India, and Elfriede went to Greece, where she made her living reading horoscopes; she began studying ancient Greek and mathematics, and developed an obsession with Plato. For almost thirty years, while Baron Omar was in India, where he met his third wife (the current rock-opera-composing Baroness), Elfriede lived in Lichtenau alone. In the seventies, when Omar-Rolf and the Baroness returned from the East, they found the schloss a ruin: Elfriede had turned the part of the castle she occupied into a garbage dump of balled-up math equations, horoscope readings, notes on Plato, and household refuse. The Baroness recalled trying to clean behind the settee we were now sitting on, but when she attempted to move it Elfriede got very upset. "She said it has been thirty-five years that it has not been shifted and it should not be shifted! Nevertheless, we moved it and we got something like thirty or forty mice. Totally filled with them." Elfriede had made her kitchen in the main sitting room, where she used an old encyclopedia as a cutting board. "At the end she cared only for her beloved Plato, anything else was uninteresting," the Baroness said of the woman she maintained was the author of "Ali and Nino."

It was now late morning, and the Baroness was ready for a nap. Saying she would give me something to do while she was sleeping, she led me down a series of passageways and rooms that became ever more decrepit and freezing, until we came to a battered wooden door. She rammed her shoulder against it. Inside was what at first glance looked like the baggage room in an old train station—wall-to-wall boxes, trunks, suitcases, and bags, some in stacks reaching up to the ceiling, with two aisles cleared for walking. "It is all here, all of the Ehrenfels family," she said, looking a bit sadly at the sea of containers. "But you can only look until the sun goes down, for there is not a light." After I had poked around for almost an hour, I realized that every suitcase and steamer trunk in the room was filled with some kind of paper. This medieval fortress, which still had holes in its walls for pouring boiling oil, had been inhabited for the past two centuries by a family of intellectuals, poets, and bookworms.

Edward Sorel

"Somehow it never occurred to me that if I lived to be ninety-six I'd be ninety-six for all eternity."

I was trying to find anything relating to Kurban Said, and I hoped in such a setting that Nietzsche's dictum would apply—that the books I needed would jump off the shelves at me. Wherever I looked, though, I mostly found piles of documents relating to the Baron's strange forty-year ride through the Islamic world, beginning with some photographs taken of him, at eleven or twelve, in a turban twice the size of his head. My "ticket" into this world was a telegram from December 21, 1932, that read, "BARON OMAR ROLF EHRENFELS TAJMAHAL HOTEL BOMBAY = EIGHTY MILLION INDIAN MUSLIM BRETHREN WELCOME YOUR LORDSHIP = SECY SHUJAUDDIN MUSLIM LEAGUE PUNJAB." An article in the *Eastern Times* of Lahore a few days later described how the Baron was greeted on the train platform by "not less than five thousand Muslims . . . amid lusty cheers of *Allah-o-Akbar*." There were countless copies of magazines like *The Muslim Review* and *The Light*, to which Baron Omar-Rolf regularly contributed articles on prospects for world Islamic revival, the state of Muslim women, and interfaith healing between Muslims and Jews. While looking them over, I discovered a whole world of European converts with names like Lord Headley al-Farooq, Major Abdullah Battersbey, and Her Highness the Dayang Muda of Sarawak, "the daughter of the late Sir Walter Palmer of Reading." There was Muhamud Gunnar Erikson from Sweden, Umar Mita from Japan, and Ismail Wieslaw Jazierski from Poland.

There was so much fascinating stuff to read about Baron Omar that it took a while to dawn on me that the castle was yielding nothing at all about Kurban Said—nothing about Elfriede, or about the Ehrenfelses' friend Essad Bey. According to the Baroness, Essad and her husband had corresponded frequently, as had Essad and Elfriede. But when I asked where this correspondence was she pointed around the walls of the castle and said, "Who can tell? Perhaps it is here somewhere, but to find it!"

The only concrete connection between the von Ehrenfels family and Essad Bey that I found was in the one thing I had brought with me: a Swiss edition of what was supposedly Kurban Said's other novel, "The Girl from the Golden Horn," which had a brief foreword by "Umar R. Ehrenfels." "As a young man I founded the 'Orient-Bund' for Afro-Asian students in Vienna and through it I became friends with the quietly observing Azerbaijani Kurban Said," he wrote. "My path led me shortly after that to India, from where I returned to Europe for the first time in 1954 and thereupon went to visit the traditional Muslim grave of my then apparently forgotten friend, which stood outside the wall of the cemetery in Positano." I asked the Baroness why Omar would have referred to Kurban Said as an Azeri man who died in Italy rather than as his ex-wife, Elfriede. The Baroness assured me that her late husband had simply never discussed the matter with Elfriede and therefore did not know of her great involvement. She repeated Heinz Barazon's theory that perhaps there had been a sexual relationship between Elfriede and Essad, but she added, "that's only his theory—we don't know a thing for sure."

A POSSIBLE explanation for Elfriede's connection to Kurban Said presented itself to me not long afterward. When I had been back in New York for a few weeks, I received an envelope from Barazon containing copies of four letters which he said the Baroness had instructed him to forward to me. They were all addressed to Omar and signed, in a small, looping hand, "Essad." They bore the return address "Casa Pattison, Positano"—the house where Essad Bey died, in 1942. The first was dated July 21, 1938, and in it Essad is trying to entice Baron Omar-Rolf to come visit him, professing his loneliness and sense of disorientation. He then writes, "I had American Express Athens send 200 dollars from Yugoslavia in the name of Mrs. Kurban Said."

Mrs. Kurban Said. Of course, it had to be Elfriede.

In the next letter, Essad again refers to Kurban Said in the third person, and it sounds more and more like a cover name for transferring sums of money across international borders: "At the Publisher Gesa Kon, Belgrade. . . . An additional $150 dollars is being held there for Kurban Said. Can Kurban Said pick up this money on the way through? And how can one contact her? . . . Write me about this as soon as you can and have Kurban Said get in touch with the publisher." It is as though she were going to a publisher to pick up money she doesn't know anything about. From the almost desperate tone of these and other letters he wrote from Positano, it seemed likely that Kurban Said was a cover for Essad so that he could continue to receive royalties from his work.

Barazon had maintained that Elfriede would not have needed to provide an Aryan cover for the real author of "Ali and Nino" because the book contract was signed in April, 1937, almost a full year before the Nazi Anschluss of Austria. But in fact Jewish authors already had plenty of reasons to disguise their identity. Dr. Murray Hall, an expert on publishing in the Nazi period, explained the situation to me: Austrian publishers, the majority of whom were Jewish, had found themselves in a bind ever since Hitler came to power, in 1933. There were three markets for books published in German—Austria, Germany, and Switzerland—and Germany's was much larger than the other two markets combined (and remains so). It simply wasn't profitable to publish a book if you could not sell it in Germany, so even while Austria remained independent, Austrian publishers needed to get their books past the Nazi censors to reach the majority of the German-reading public. In order to confuse the censors, fake subsidiary houses were established in third countries like Holland or Sweden, and books were printed in one country, bound in the next, and then shipped across multiple borders before making it into the Reich. (Tal, the publisher of "Ali and Nino," engaged in such subterfuge.) Another solution was to have authors use cover names.

Later, in the files of the Italian Fascist Political Police in Rome, I found a trail of letters demonstrating that Essad had special reason to use a cover name in 1937. A note from an Italian informant in Vienna to his superior in Rome is typical of the sort of scrutiny he was under that summer. Dated July 8th, it begins:

> Your Excellence,
> I have the honor to tell you that I've found out that the publications of Essad Bey, who is renamed Leo Nussimbaum, are forbidden in Germany. For this reason he tried to smuggle them, under a new name, into the country. The trick was, however, discovered and Essad Bey didn't reach his goal.

Though this does not prove that Essad was concealing his identity behind Kurban Said, it shows that he had cause to. In fact, he landed in Positano after narrowly escaping the Anschluss, and he evidently regarded his new beach-town home, with "the hysterical faces of the bathers," as a prison.

ESSAD BEY was just twenty-four when "Blood and Oil in the Orient," his first book, was published in Germany, in 1929. By the time he died, twelve years later, at age thirty-six, he had published at least fourteen more books, not counting the two novels by Kurban Said—an average of one book every ten months. I found it hard to develop a complete bibliography from library catalogues and the Internet, since new titles were always popping up—biographies of Lenin and Stalin and one of the Tsar, a history of the world oil industry, a study of the Russian secret police.

The books are still readable seventy years after they were written, in no small part because Essad narrated even the driest analysis of oil-pricing mechanisms as though it were a tale from "The Thousand and One Nights." His Stalin is like no other Stalin one can find anywhere; reading his biography was like reading "an account of the life of a Chicago gangster and not very different in atmosphere," a critic wrote in the American monthly *Outlook*. And when Essad's next book on the Soviet Union appeared, in 1933, less than a year later, the *Times* ran a news story under the headline "BOOK SEES RUSSIA IN GRIP OF CRUELTY: ESSAD-BEY TELLS OF COMPULSORY PARADISE . . . BOLSHEVIKS, IN ZEAL TO FOUND A NEW RELIGION, BECOME SLAVES DRIVEN TO DOOM, HE SAYS."

Essad wrote a kind of contemporary social and historical romance, a genre still possible before the horrors of the late nineteen-thirties and forties made contemporary history seem distinctly unromantic. But, as I discovered, his chief ongoing invention was himself. He was a Weimar media star, a professional Man of the Caucasus. Though he received much attention on this side of the Atlantic—when he arrived by ship in New York in 1935, the *Times* headline read "CZAR'S BIOGRAPHER HERE: ESSAD

BEY DECLARES RULER WAS NOT UNDERSTOOD"—it was always German readers who mattered most to him. He had adopted Berlin as his home in the early twenties and made German the language of his books. Yet while American reviewers found Essad's ongoing self-invention charming—it was really as American as apple pie—it elicited a harsher reaction in Germany.

Because of Essad's hidden identity, German reviewers took it upon themselves not merely to warn the public away from his first book but, in a sense, to "out" the author. Essad, who liked to go around Berlin dressed in his "native" costume—sometimes a Caucasian warlord's fur hat and caftan, sometimes a turban with a gemstone set in the center—was perceived as a kind of ethnic cross-dresser, as well as something far more devious. The following review, from the journal *Der Nahe Osten* ("The Near East"), is typical:

> This book is one of the most miserable publications of recent years. . . . The author, who introduces himself as "Mohammad Essad-Bey" and pretends to be the son of a Tartar oil magnate from Baku, has turned out to be a Jewish dissident named Leo (Lob) Nussimbaum, born in Kiev in 1905, son of a Jew named Abraham Nussimbaum from Tiflis. When one compares the accounts in the book, according to which the author was threatening Russian ministers at the age of ten, and in which the author pretends to be a relative of the Emir of Bukhara and an expert on Muslim customs, one gets a clear idea of the whole grotesquerie. . . . The Muslims will presumably firmly reject their alleged fellow believer "Mohammad Essad-Bey." (Essad=in Arabic asad, esed=lion=Lob=Leo?)

Essad wasn't born in Kiev, but, otherwise, the reviewer had a point. While never publicly deviating from his story that his father was a Muslim lord, Essad was almost certainly sharing an apartment in Berlin at the time with his actual father, who was indeed a Jewish businessman named Abraham Nussimbaum. They had left Baku together in 1919, and, after a harrowing flight across the Caucasus, one step ahead of the Bolsheviks, they arrived, via Istanbul, Rome, and Paris, in Berlin in 1921. During the months they spent in Istanbul, waiting for transit papers, young Lev had fallen in love with the symbolism and ambience of the Orient, and had taken his Turkish name. Essad never admitted to being a Jew at all, but in his second book, "Twelve Secrets of the Caucasus," he effectively turned all Caucasians into Jews:

> All Caucasian peoples without exception have taken over some legacy from the Jews: here an Old Testament word used by them in their prayers, there some custom, such as levirate marriage. In any case, the Jewish facial type is remarkably widespread among the population of the Caucasus, and in a purer and nobler form than is often to be met with among purely Jewish peoples. Savage, brutal warriors, knights and brigands, would be indistinguishable from Galician rabbis or workers if they were dressed in the correct clothes. Many Caucasian races confess their Jewish origin with pride, and are considered honorably distinguished by it.

In one sense, Essad was only an extreme example of a European type that might be called the Jewish Orientalist. Aside from the obvious example of Disraeli, who led Europe's most powerful nation as a baptized Christian while writing books extolling the superiority of Semites, there was his contemporary William Gifford Palgrave—original family name Cohen—who left his assimilated, prominent family to find his "Oriental roots" in the desert. Disguising himself as a Muslim doctor, while secretly working for the Jesuits, Father Cohen (the name Palgrave chose for himself) carried out a plot funded by Napoleon III to stir up an Arab-Bedouin revolt—fifty years before T. E. Lawrence arrived in the Middle East. (His memoir was the best-selling English book about Arabia until Lawrence's memoir superseded it.) The phenomenon was related to the broader British romance with the East, but quite distinct, since the Jewish Orientalist saw the East as a place not to discover the exotic Other but to explore his own roots, and for him the Arabs were not merely noble savages but blood brothers—"Jews on horseback," as Disraeli put it.

Jewish Orientalism took on both a more intense and a more tragic aspect in Germany. Cultured Jews, as one anti-Semitic tract put it, "may talk about Goethe, Schiller, and Schlegel all they please; they nonetheless remain an alien Oriental people." The charge of being European on the surface but Oriental at heart was levelled against assimilated German Jews throughout the nineteenth century. The very term "anti-Semitism" was coined in 1879 by Wilhelm Marr, a Hamburg pamphleteer, as a means of lumping Jews in with other Semites and hence tarring them as Orientals. Most German Jews responded by trying even harder to purge themselves of all traces of "the East"—which had the double meaning of Eastern Europe and the Middle East—and influencing their fellow-Jews to do the same.

But much as Zionists coöpted the anti-Semitic notion that Jews could never fit into other nations and turned it into the positive goal of modern Jewish statehood, German Jewish Orientalists took the anti-Semites' slur and turned it on its head: "Within the Jews lives the whole force of Asiatic genius: the unification of the soul," the philosopher Martin Buber wrote, "the Asia of boundlessness and of sacred unity." Buber's Zionism was based on the idea that every Jew had an Oriental inside him that was his eternal and true self, and that this should be a source of pride rather than of embarrassment.

Perhaps the most striking figure in this subculture besides Essad was the poet Else Lasker-Schüler, who claimed she could speak "Asiatic," approximating the original language of the Biblical Jews, whom she called "Wild Jews." Her concept of the Wild Jews—freed of the debilitating effects of two millennia of life in the Diaspora—became quite popular. (Indeed, Essad puts Wild Jews, though a Caucasian variant, in a number of his books.) The painter Oskar Kokoschka, a friend of Lasker-Schüler's, recalled walking through the streets of Bonn with Else dressed in her usual costume: "Harem pants, a turban, and with long, black hair, with a cigarette in a long holder. . . . [We] were of course laughed at and derided by the passersby who gathered, cheered by the children, and nearly beaten up by the irritated students."

Unlike other Jewish Orientalists, Essad really was from the East, and, though he left the Caucasus when he was barely fifteen, he evidently devoted years of study under German and Russian scholars in Berlin to becoming an authentic Eastern wild man. As it happened, I found an account that revealed just how early Essad's self-invention had begun.

When the first United States edition of "Ali and Nino" came out, in 1971, Random House fielded many letters proposing theories about the author's identity. Looking through the original editor's files, I found one particularly convincing letter from someone named Alexander Brailow, who said that Kurban Said was none other than his friend

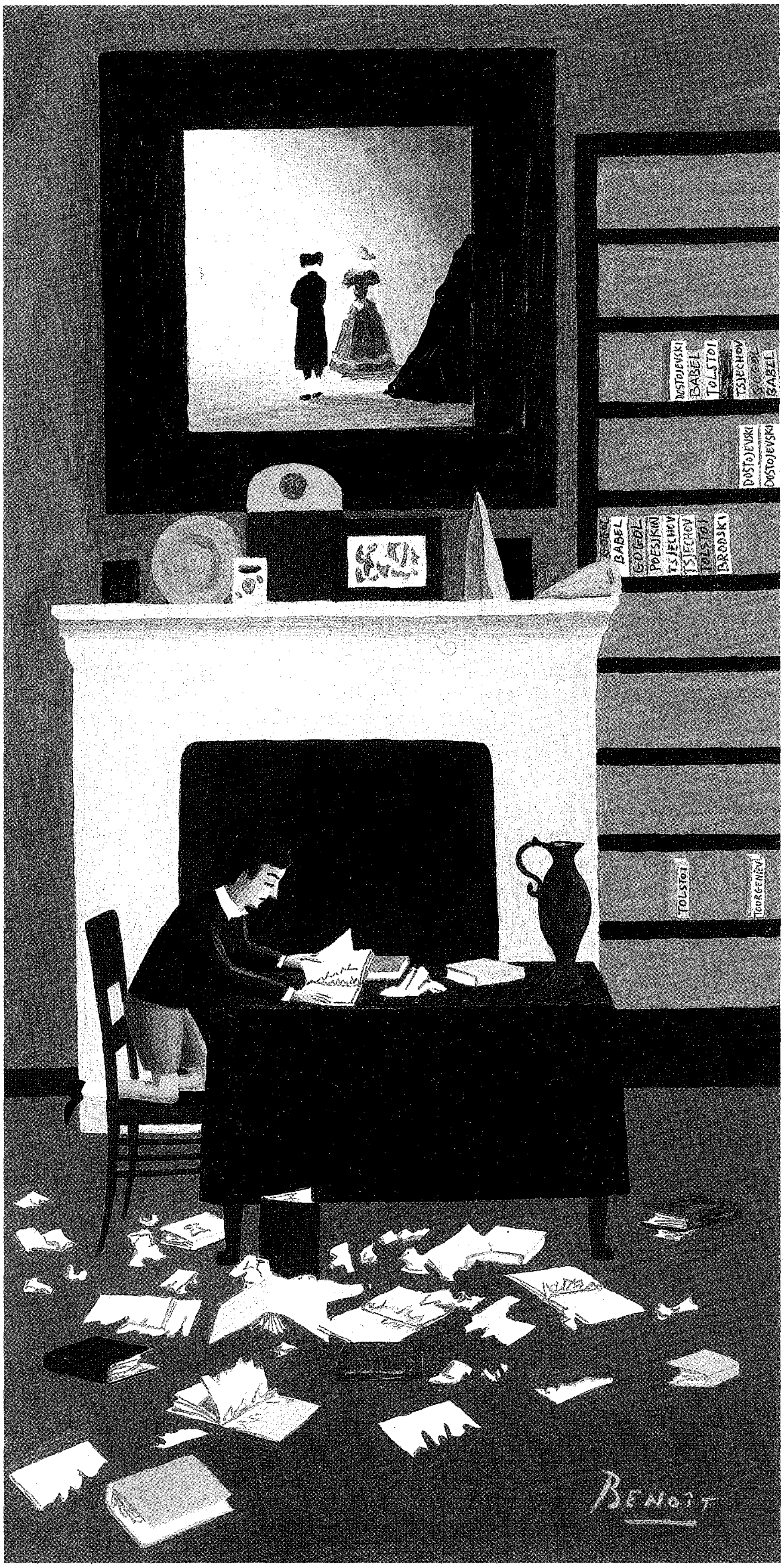
Essad Bey, from the Russian high school in Berlin. It turned out that Brailow’s widow lived in upstate New York, and when I got back from Vienna I contacted her. “Oh, you mean Essad Bey!” she said when I called, as though speaking about someone she’d seen just last week. “Alex put quite a bit about Essad in his memoir. You’re welcome to read it if you come up here. I’ve only got one copy.”

There are few things scarier than a seven-hundred-page unpublished memoir, especially one handed to you by the author’s widow, who will be sitting in the room while you read it. But Brailow’s recollections of events of more than seventy years ago were lively and detailed; a refugee from St. Petersburg, he had travelled in a circle of White Russian émigrés who congregated in the Berlin apartment of Boris Pasternak’s parents, and included Helen Nabokov (the novelist’s sister) and the two brothers Peschkowsky, one of whom, Pavel, became the father of the director Mike Nichols (born Michael Peschkowsky). Both Peschkowskys were medical students, but Tobias, called Tossia, fancied himself a poet, and read aloud to the group romantic odes he had written to the sweetheart he’d left behind in Siberia. Into this circle walked an intense, flamboyant young man from the Caucasus, Essad Bey. Brailow recalled Essad’s affairs with a succession of German girls, “usually pink-cheeked blondes, to whose fluffy golden hair he would invariably draw attention,” until he fell hard for a dark Russian beauty named Zhenia Voronov. Brailow was convinced that she was the model for Nino. He confirmed that Essad had lost his mother at an early age and was brought up by a German governess, who “was known to everybody only as Alilichka,” and suggested that Essad’s early reading of Lermontov and Tolstoy had shaped his romantic idealization of the Caucasus.

Brailow believed that Essad, having grown up in a cosmopolitan, Russified Jewish household, searched for authenticity in “the world of the native servants whose roots were right there, in the Moslem villages, or ‘aouls’ nestling in the mountains of Baku’s hinterland.” In Brailow’s papers I also found an amusing account of Essad’s conversion:

> When the Nussenbaums fled from Baku to Constantinople in 1919 young Lev asked the mullah of a neighboring mosque to ac-

SKETCHBOOK BY BENOÎT VAN INNIS



> cept him formally into Islam. After a comic interlude due to the mullah's ignorance of the similarity between Judaism and Islam as far as the practice of circumcision is concerned, an interlude which Essad used to recount with his customary mixture of earnestness and burlesque, he became formally a Moslem.

While most of the students at the Russian high school got used to calling him Essad, at his insistence, he was "Lev Nussenbaum" on his passport and school documents. Yet his Caucasian accent seemed to get thicker as the semester wore on, and some of his classmates couldn't resist teasing him about his increasingly Islamic identity. One classmate in particular "delighted in provoking temper tantrums in Essad, and Essad, besides being a nervous type, seemed to indulge in outbursts of murderous rage, perhaps because he felt that this was his obligation as an 'Oriental,' for whom revenge would be a sacred duty." Essad once pulled a knife on his tormentor, and Brailow intervened to prevent his friend's "Caucasian temper" from leading to murder.

Nussimbaum's metamorphosis from a bookish Jew into a Muslim man of the desert amused his Russian friends, but it deeply offended his fellow-immigrants from the Caucasus. In an open letter that appeared in a number of newspapers, a group of prominent exiles insisted that the transgressor wasn't from the Caucasus at all but was, rather, a Galician Jew, the lowest of the low. "He is no Oriental and his name isn't Essad Bey," fumed the undersigned representatives of the Azeri, Georgian, Persian, and Turkestani communities in Berlin.

Indeed, Essad's Orient was a different one from that of his detractors. One of the most striking chapters in "Twelve Secrets of the Caucasus" describes a place Essad calls the "political Switzerland of the Caucasus," the Valley of the Khevsurs, or Khevsuria: "There a man could at last be safe." A reviewer for the New York *Herald Tribune* struggled to pinpoint Khevsuria on the map:

> Khevsuria is quite near Tiflis, and yet the land is free, independent, and no policeman dares to follow his victim there. A gigantic wall of rock surrounds Khevsuria and separates it from the rest of the world. . . . From the cliff wall down into the void there hangs a long rope. Whoever has the courage can catch hold of the rope and let himself down to the Khevsurs. The police never follow. . . . Through it the first immigrants must have entered the land. Only the refugee dares use the rope, to be accepted if he is so inclined into the society of the Khevsurs and protected for ever from all dangers.

The *Tribune* critic concluded with annoyance that the author must provide more accurate information next time. Essad also published a longer article about Khevsuria in a geographical journal. The Khevsurs are Christians, he says, but Jesus is unknown to them; they keep kosher, practice polygamy, and worship beer. Out of respect for every religion, they keep the Sabbath on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, but also on Monday—"to show that the Khevsurs are a free race who can do just as they please."

This is the Orient Essad Bey is from: a mountainous realm insulated from political and ethnic conflict, a refuge where no secret policeman can follow, and where anyone with the courage to climb down the rope into the abyss is accepted—in short, the Orient of the imagination.

I was given the protest letter from the Caucasian exiles by Dr. Gerhard Höpp, of the Zentrum Moderner Orient, in Berlin, whose specialty is the history of Germany's Islamic community. He had pieced together practically every bit of Essad's official history in Berlin, and told me that his fellow-exiles went so far as to petition members of the Reichstag to denounce Essad and, in the spring of 1930, to lodge a formal complaint with the Foreign Ministry, warning that the publication of his books would "damage the reputation of Germany in the Orient." The officer who received this complaint apparently kept his eye on Essad, for in 1933 he appealed to the new Nazi Propaganda Ministry to do something about the "deceptive productions of this extremely businesslike Jew." But Goebbels' ministry responded by supporting Essad Bey's recent books—those that exposed the evils of Stalin's empire—and saying that it knew of no proof that he was really Jewish. Essad was even allowed into the Imperial Union of German Writers and the Imperial Literary Chamber, which was necessary to publish in the Third Reich. He kept both memberships until April 6, 1935, when the fact of his Jewishness was finally assimilated by the Nazi bureaucracy and the new Nuremberg race laws ended his publishing career in Germany.

By that time, however, Essad had fled Nazi Berlin and was firmly ensconced in Vienna's Café Herrenhof, whose smoky rooms had become the unofficial capital of literary exile in Europe. In the mid-nineteen-thirties, Essad shared the place with regulars like Hermann Broch, Max Brod and Franz Werfel (both recent arrivals from Prague), and his friend Walter Mehring, the *Kabarettist* from Berlin. The Herrenhof was to post-First World War Vienna what the Café Central had been in the prewar years, the most dynamic of what the writer Stefan Zweig called

BRUSHES
PENCILS
PAPER
OILS-ACRYLICS
CHALK-PASTELS
ELEPHANT DUNG
ART SUPPLIES

the city's "democratic clubs." And just as the Central had provided the conversation and the caffeine for Lev Bronstein—Trotsky—to dream up the Bolshevik Revolution, the Herrenhof now offered Essad space to dream of a counter-revolution in Russia. As a former citizen of the Tsar, Essad had always believed in "true monarchy," in which the head of state would be the "nearly superhuman peak of the pyramid of humanity," as he wrote in a 1931 newspaper article. "Dictatorship and monarchy are absolute opposites, for the very reason that dictatorship exhibits all the drawbacks of a monarchy and not a single one of its advantages." But he evidently modified that view, because by 1937, after completing a biography of Muhammad and another book on Islam, he proposed himself as Mussolini's official biographer.

"He said he can't complain. Business is good."

Dozens of letters in Italian archives tell the full, bizarre story of Essad's campaign. In the files of the Ministry of Popular Culture in Rome I found a tantalizing little card, dated July 3, 1937, written in Essad's distinctive schoolboy script:

> His Excellency
> Benito Mussolini
> Chief of the Italian Government
> with deepest respect
> Essad-Bey

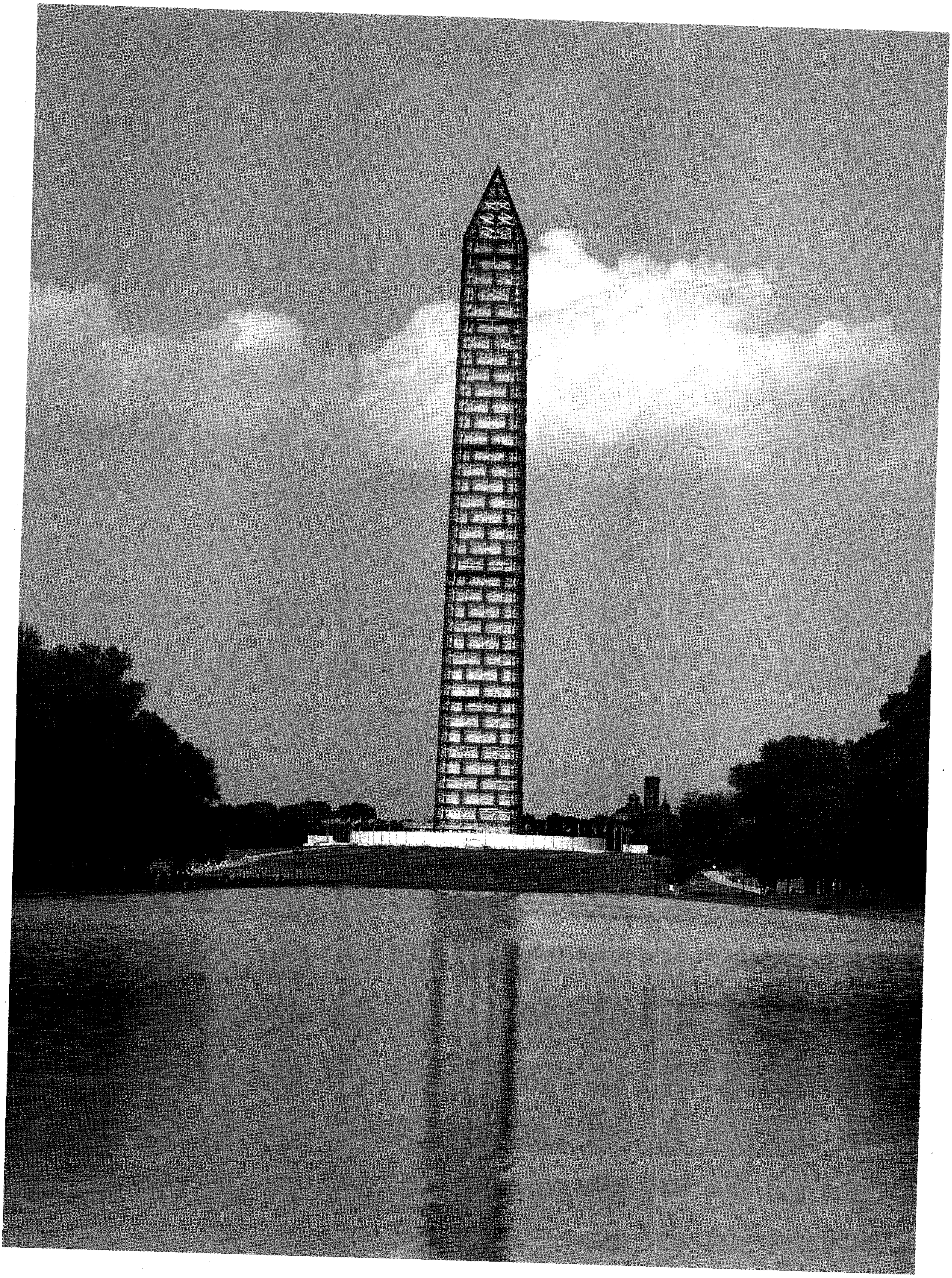
Starting in 1936, Essad made increasingly frequent trips to Italy and he may indeed have visited Il Duce personally. The files show that Essad developed a web of connections in Northern Italy with the purpose of getting close to Mussolini, and that he had a powerful patron in this effort—Giovanni Gentile, the most prominent intellectual to join Mussolini's Cabinet and one of his closest advisers. But for a writer whose real name was Nussimbaum to propose himself as Mussolini's official biographer in 1937 took almost suicidal chutzpah. When he was denounced as a Jew by an informant, the project immediately collapsed, but he kept his sights set on Rome, and when Nazi troops entered Vienna in March, 1938, he fled the expanding Third Reich into the world of Fascist Italy.

Essad circumvented the authorities' refusal to issue him a visa by going first to the Italian colony of Libya, where he worked for a time as a translator for the colony's Fascist governor Italo Balbo; from there he made it to the Continent, and by the summer of 1938 the secret police were trailing him across Italy. But the Italians were new at the game of racial persecution—a letter in the secret-police files from September, 1938, states that they were still trying to determine the racial origins of "Leo Nusimbaum"—and in another move the Gestapo would have scorned, the agents who were following Essad lost him in Rome.

In the correspondence between the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Rome and the Prefect in Salerno, I discovered that Essad had yet another identity switch up his sleeve: he was getting around Italy by posing as an American. In the mid-thirties, Essad had travelled widely, doing field work in North Africa and lecturing all over Europe. He also made at least two tours of the United States, where his host was George Sylvester Viereck, a journalist, poet, and novelist, who was later revealed as a top Nazi agent operating in the United States. Viereck, whose public admirers included Thomas Mann and George Bernard Shaw, had been one of the chief American popularizers of Freud and a great defender of Hitler. (He never understood why his pro-Nazi stance made his Jewish friends renounce him, and always insisted that despite the fact that he was a Teutonic "blond beast," he was an eternal Jew at heart.) As probably the most conflicted American public figure with regard to issues of race and nation, Viereck was the perfect host for Essad Bey. Ironically, Viereck most likely funded Essad's American lecture tours with money provided to him by the Third Reich's Propaganda Ministry.

While Essad managed to use ship tickets and his expired U.S. entry permit to convince the Italian authorities that he was an American citizen, the Italian racial laws and his inconclusive outing as a Jew meant that his publishing contracts were forfeited. In September, 1938, sick and near starving for lack of income in Positano, he made a bizarre and desperate appeal to his benefactor, Gentile:

> The airtight documentation of Aryan ancestry three generations back is in my case extraordinarily difficult to provide. . . . Could you please recommend a competent anthropologist, in Rome or Florence, who after appropriate examination can produce a definitive verdict as to my racial composition? It must of course be done by a scholar who enjoys the trust of the offi-



SHOWCASE BY TODD EBERLE

POSTMODERN PILLAR

THE Washington Monument is the only vertical object in the relentlessly horizontal cityscape of Washington, D.C. Nothing else comes even close to it in height, but it is so reticent, so controlled, that it seems simply to punctuate its surroundings, not to dominate them. The city revolves around the thin, five-hundred-and-fifty-five-foot white marble obelisk as if it were a Maypole. The monument was designed by the architect Robert Mills in 1845 but wasn't completed until more than forty years later, largely because of the reluctance of Congress to appropriate money for the project. Congressional reticence at one point left the pillar stalled at an awkward hundred and sixty feet, making it look, as Mark Twain put it, like "a factory chimney with the top broken off."

Robert Mills did not intend to be Washington's first modern architect, nor did he know what form his design would finally take. He had planned to put a classical temple at the base of the pillar, and he died before the building committee decided to jettison this part of his scheme. The committee was trying to save money, but it may also have been swayed by the suggestion of Robert C. Winthrop, the former Speaker of the House, that it should "fall back on the simple shaft as free from anything tinsel or tawdry." For all of this century, the monument looked pretty much as it did in 1888, when it was opened to the public. But last year the National Park Service, in preparation for a two-year restoration of the exterior, sheathed the monument in aluminum scaffolding designed by the architect Michael Graves, who has transformed the obelisk into a joyful cartoon of itself. The outside of the scaffolding is covered with a blue mesh fabric designed to look like huge stone slabs, each over thirteen feet tall. The gigantic scrim celebrates both construction and reconstruction, and reminds us that the sleek and sober monument was built stone by stone. —PAUL GOLDBERGER

> cial authorities. . . . As soon as I get money from you, I will go to Florence, and I hope that by then you will have found an anthropologist who is prepared to prove, scientifically, to which race I now actually belong.

There is no record of a reply to this suggestion, and the next letter in the Florence archive is from a surgeon named Dr. Vito Fiorentino, who informs Gentile that "Essad Bey is very sick and is afflicted by Raynaud's disease, for which at the moment science does not have a cure." Raynaud's is a vascular disease that, in its most serious form, leads to gangrene and other complications. In early 1939, Essad was taken to a hospital in Naples, where they began treatment by amputating a number of toes on his left foot; this is apparently how the myth about his stabbing himself in the foot originated. The local police, far from arresting him, did everything they could to raise money for his medical care. When the town of Positano ran out of money, a request was forwarded to the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Rome, which handed the matter over to the Foreign Ministry, which in turn made a request to the American Embassy on Essad's behalf. The Italian authorities were told that he had never been a citizen of the United States.

WHILE Essad was trapped in his seaside prison in Italy, his father was still in Vienna. He sent desperate word to Elfriede—"Mrs. Kurban Said"—to go to Vienna to try to protect the old man if the Gestapo came looking for him, and she apparently went there a number of times. Most of Essad's friends—the world of agents, editors, and writers whom he'd regaled at the Herrenhof with his tales and adventures—were now "scattered throughout the whole world . . . I do not know when or how I will ever see them again." His Viennese publishers were also gone. Lucy Tal escaped the day after the Anschluss, just beating the Gestapo agents to the train west. Rolf Passer, who had published Essad's latest Middle East travelogue and his biography of the Shah of Iran, fled via Prague to London. The stewardship of Essad's German publisher, the Passer Verlag, was turned over to a young Aryan assistant named Therese Kirschner, who purchased it for approximately a thirtieth of its assessed value, the money passing into a special publishing "de-Judification fund."

Tal and Passer were now dead. But when I'd spoken with Dr. Höpp, the German Islamicist, in Berlin, he'd mentioned in passing that Therese Kirschner was still living in Vienna. He had written to her about Essad, but he'd got nowhere; it was his impression that Kirschner, who now went under her late husband's name, Mögle, was too guarded about her past to talk to anybody.

After going to Positano, where I visited Essad's grave (a white slab with a marble turban on top, like a thin man wearing a hat), I made one last trip to Vienna. Frau Mögle wasn't listed in the phone directory, but I walked to the address where the Passer publishing house had been, and there at the top of the list of names was "Mögle" and beneath it the logo of the publishing house to which she had given her own name in 1940: "Therese Kirschner Verlag." I decided against ringing and went back and wrote a careful letter on my hotel stationery, emphasizing that all I was interested in was an author named Essad Bey and any recollections she might have of him or his works. I sent it by messenger. Twenty minutes later I was drinking a coffee in the hotel lobby when the concierge called me over. A Frau Therese Mögle wanted me on the telephone.

Frau Mögle had a face like a small, defiant eagle. She came to meet me at the hotel dressed in an expensive-looking loden suit and a green fedora, which she wore at a jaunty angle. She was ninety-six but seemed much younger, with an intense, focussed sturdiness. She talked about her writers like a schoolteacher remembering pupils from a class long ago. Most of the company's writers had been Jewish and had fled Vienna within weeks of the Anschluss, though the firm continued to record profits from their books up to two years later. Frau Mögle talked of their departure with a strange sort of indignation, referring to one author who "left without saying a word, just took off leaving me to look after his affairs."

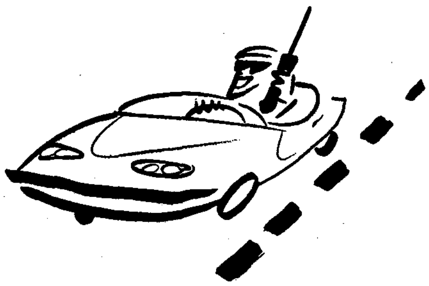
Once she got started, Frau Mögle's memory was a strange, whirling thing, full of precisely recalled faces, manuscripts, sums of money, and accusations. The only intrusions from after 1945 were descriptions of the donations she had made to various children's societies in Africa. One refrain constantly surfaced: “I was not a bad person, you see, I was not bad, I saved people, I saved so many people, I had to look after everything for them, I could not stand to see suffering.” It was the weighty task of looking after everything left behind by her fleeing Jewish authors that brought us back to Essad, who had left behind a father.

“The old Nussimbaum, yes, Essad’s father, when he saw me he said I was a Nazi, you see I had such white-blond hair, platinum-blond you know, but Camilla, that was my secretary, she said, ‘She’s here to help you,’ but still the old Nussimbaum was scared of me.” She said Abraham Nussimbaum had spoken to her of funding Stalin’s early career with bribes and of the millions he had in Baku, and she described how he was always perfectly dressed in expensive suits and how he hired servants to polish his shoes up until the very end, when he ran out of everything and they finally came for him. “Camilla went up to see him, I was waiting downstairs in the car, and she came back and said Nussimbaum has been transported away to Modliborzyce, but where is that? How could I know where that was?” (According to Viennese Jewish community records, Essad’s father was put on a transport to Poland on March 5, 1941.) “We never got a letter, nothing.”

She said that before Abraham Nussimbaum disappeared, he had begged her to go down to see Essad, in Positano. She showed me four separate passports—all apparently legal and all containing her Aryan certification—that she’d needed to get around Europe in those days, and said, “It was very difficult to go to Positano then, it was the war, but when I give my word, that’s it, so I went.” She’d spent two weeks with Essad in the cliffside village, living in his little house with his old nurse from Baku, Alice Schulte (Alilichka). “He didn’t scream,” Frau Mögle said. “He howled like an animal, *howled*, a noise you cannot imagine. It was his illness, this Raynaud’s disease, that made pieces come off of his feet.” (When I visited Positano, the granddaughter of Essad’s landlady had told me that her mother used to remark every time the doctor left the house, “They’ve cut off another chunk of the Muslim, Mama.”)

By this time, we had walked down the street, back to Frau Mögle’s apartment, the former publishing office. I asked her if she had heard of Elfriede von Ehrenfels or knew anything about her connection to Kurban Said, but she said she had never heard of any Ehrenfels, and that Kurban Said was Essad’s name for his light novels. We talked about “Ali and Nino”— “magical, really one of his best things”—and then Frau Mögle said, “But have you read the other novel that he wrote as Kurban Said? Have you read ‘The Man Who Knew Nothing About Love’?” I said I’d never heard of it.

She looked at me slyly, then got up and shuffled into another room. I thought she might be going to get another sea-lion fur coat to model for me—she had shown me a number of them already, in a variety of styles—but she returned instead with a stack of six small leather notebooks, tied together with a ribbon. She put them down in front of me and untied the ribbon. “I have been keeping these in my closet for more than fifty years. I could have made a fortune with them, but I am not a greedy person, I am not bad person, am I?”



I picked up the first notebook, which had a heavily embossed brown leather cover. On the first yellowing, brittle page, in the familiar childlike script, were the words “Kurban Said.” It struck me that this was the first time I had ever seen “Kurban Said” in Essad’s handwriting. Beneath the name, it said, “Der Mann der Nichts von der Liebe Verstand,” and beneath that, “Novel. Book One.” I read aloud in German the first line, written in an awkward inky scrawl:

> Pain is stronger than life, stronger than death, love, loyalty, duty.

A little below that, as I followed the crooked lines of ink, was a statement of intent: “This book is not supposed to be literature. I want to cast a retrospective glance over my life now, in the face of death. My intention is to write down, as

DEAR DD

The paperboy arrived, the afternoon
of your first byline
in the Boston *Evening Transcript*,
and into the yard rattled your dapper fiancé,

the Quaker Oats salesman
in his company car.
You put the paper aside. The photographs
of that other world, so near to us

in black-and-white.
Eighty years have put the city in the country,
the pruned gardens out of date
as whalebone corsets.

Your grandfather, a packet captain
on the North River, young captain of captains,
was salt-preserved and famous as far as Fall River.
And then *your* parents,

impossibly aged, black-worsted beetles
emerging with canes from their forties Packard.

I remember their tilting piles of unread *Time.*
Here Bobbie and Gampie,

brand-new as cellophane, lie in your shoebox,
her tea shop and his grocery,
all that life we could wish for them,
and then wish for ourselves.

Old and then young again, old then young,
like a fairy tale. Beneath the last curling Kodaks,
William at Humarock, emperor of castles
swept by the next tide.

Or *is* it me?
As you lay on your deathbed,
plastic tubes through your nose,
your daughter my mother could not rouse you.

Your eyes had that thousand-yard stare.
"It's William," I said. "William, the poet."
Your eyes cleared and you looked at me,
and then, in a hoarse, hunted whisper,

"You only think you are."

—William Logan

truthfully as possible, the strange life that has become my fate."

Frau Mögle said that Essad had given her these six notebooks, his final work, when she went down to see him in Positano. "He wanted me to publish them, and I could have made a fortune, but I never did, I could not read them, you feel his pain too much, it is too terrible to feel his pain, so I kept them and I never did anything with them. You can take them and read them, if you want."

I walked out of the ancient apartment building. It was the night of the Opera ball, and people trudged improbably through new snow in *Frack*, or full tails, and ball gowns. I recalled how Elisabeth Castonier, a German writer also trapped in Positano in 1938, wrote in her memoir that the exiles all had a party when the "mysterious Russian-Turk had his *Frack* sent down from Vienna." I clutched the notebooks to my chest to keep them dry. Why had Essad given Frau Mögle these notebooks? Why had she given them to me? Back in my room, I threw myself onto the bed and opened the first notebook.

The tiny blue script told a sprawling, improbable tale: A boy in revolutionary Baku seeing corpses piled in wheelbarrows, a monocle-wearing teen-ager on a German island kissing blond girls who remind him of reptiles, a young scholar learning about "his" Orient at German universities and becoming a celebrated writer. There is the soap opera of Essad's brief marriage to an heiress and international beauty, which I knew about from a Hollywood-tabloid item on their explosive breakup ("RICH POETESS FREED OF MOSLEM MATE BY 'REMOTE CONTROL' "). He meets Arab paratroopers, king's emissaries, tuxedoed millionaires in Prague, and ragged gurus in Cairo alleyways, until, alone, naked in a hotel room, washing the desert off his body, he notices a black spot growing on his foot. It was the story of Essad's life, interrupted by scenes of his present pain. He takes morphine while writing some sections, smokes hashish while writing others, but the most surreal prose comes when he's taking only pain, trying to adjust to a stark reality that cannot be mediated by language or culture or learning or attitude.

As the notebooks progressed, both Essad's scrawl and his stories became more densely packed; I found myself slipping into the role of the obtuse reviewer for the *Herald Tribune*, trying to find Khevsuria on the map. The author's descent and destruction were almost as fantastic as his ascent had been, and I realized what it was that was so compelling about Essad: he believed he could invent his way in and out of anything. Even confined in a tiny room watching his own body disintegrate, he fights to enclose one more identity inside another, like a living Chinese box.

In the final notebook, he creates a foreword to the work, in which he constructs a framing fiction for its composition—a mysterious scholar whose name he prefers not to disclose. He describes his meeting and subsequent friendship with this cosmopolitan young Dr. X, of whom every trace, after some years, suddenly vanishes. "His postcards stopped coming, and the scholarly journals published no new works of his. He seemed to be lost; indeed to have disappeared. . . . How great then was my astonishment when a few months ago I received in the mail a thick notebook that contained the account that follows here." But he adds, reflecting upon Dr. X's sad story, "I had the immediate impression that the true cause of all of these derailments and misfortunes remained a mystery, not only to me but to the author himself, and that this cause was to be sought somewhere outside the events here."

Indeed, for Essad the cause was outside the events of the tale—in a Europe where race and religion were no longer the material of playful self-invention but, rather, quantities as fixed as a death sentence. At moments in the notebooks, Essad becomes frantic that his father's letters have stopped coming, but he always refrains from confronting the reason why this would be. The manuscript closes with a final letter from Dr. X, postmark Mecca, in which he describes his new life in an Arabian kingdom that accepts him as the real thing, the Orient's Orientalist, and establishes him in an intellectual palace surrounded by harmony and brotherly love. But in the notebook's last sentence Lev Nussimbaum returns to his deepest disguise in a world that has left him without an audience for the most disturbing of his stories:

I feel I have nothing to add to these lines.

—Kurban Said ♦

ANNALS OF MEDICINE

WHOSE BODY IS IT, ANYWAY?

What doctors should do when patients make bad decisions.

BY ATUL GAWANDE

THE first time I saw the patient, it was the day before his surgery and I thought he might be dead. Joseph Lazaroff, as I'll call him, lay in bed, his eyes closed, a sheet pulled up over his thin, birdlike chest. When people are asleep—or even when they are anesthetized and not breathing by themselves—it does not occur to you to question whether they are alive. They exude life as if it were heat. It's visible in the tone of an arm muscle, the supple curve of their lips, the flush of their skin. But as I bent forward to tap Lazaroff on the shoulder I found myself stopping short with that instinctive apprehension of touching the dead. His color was all wrong—pallid, fading. His cheeks, eyes, and temples were sunken, and his skin was stretched over his face like a mask. Strangest of all, his head was suspended two inches above his pillow, as if rigor mortis had set in.

"Mr. Lazaroff?" I called out, and his eyes opened. He looked at me without interest, silent and motionless.

I was in my first year of surgical residency and was working on the neurosurgery team at the time. Lazaroff had a cancer that had spread throughout his body, and he had been scheduled for surgery to excise a tumor from his spine. The senior resident had sent me to "consent" him—that is, to get Lazaroff's signature giving final permission for the operation. No problem, I had said. But now, looking at this frail, withered man, I had to wonder if we were right to operate on him.

His patient chart told the story. Eight months earlier, he had seen his doctor about a backache. The doctor initially found nothing suspicious, but three months later the pain had worsened and he ordered a scan. It revealed extensive cancer—multiple tumors in Lazaroff's liver, bowel, and up and down his spine. A biopsy showed an untreatable cancer.

Lazaroff was only in his early sixties, a longtime city administrator who had a touch of diabetes, the occasional angina, and the hardened manner of a man who had lost his wife a few years earlier and learned to live alone. His condition deteriorated rapidly. In a matter of months, he lost more than fifty pounds. As the tumors in his abdomen grew, his belly, scrotum, and legs filled up with fluid. The pain and debility eventually made it impossible for him to keep working. His thirty-something son moved in to care for him. Lazaroff went on around-the-clock morphine to control his pain. His doctors told him that he might have only weeks to live. Lazaroff wasn't ready to hear it, though. He still talked about the day he'd go back to work.

Then he took several bad falls; his legs had become unaccountably weak. He also became incontinent. He went back to his oncologist. A scan showed that a metastasis was compressing his thoracic spinal cord. The oncologist admitted him to the hospital and tried a round of radiation, but it had no effect. Indeed, he became unable to move his right leg; his lower body was becoming paralyzed.

He had two options left. He could undergo spinal surgery. It wouldn't cure him—surgery or not, he had at the most a few months left—but it offered a last-ditch chance of halting the progression of spinal-cord damage and possibly restoring some strength to his legs and sphincters. The risks, however, were severe. We'd have to go in through his chest and collapse his lung just to get at his spine. He'd face a long, difficult, and painful recovery. And given his frail condition—not to mention the previous history of heart disease—his chance of surviving the procedure and getting back home was slim.

The alternative was to do nothing. He'd go home and continue with hospice care, which would keep him comfortable and help him maintain a measure of control over his life. The immobility and incontinence would certainly worsen. But it was his best chance of dying peacefully, in his own bed, and being able to say goodbye to his loved ones.

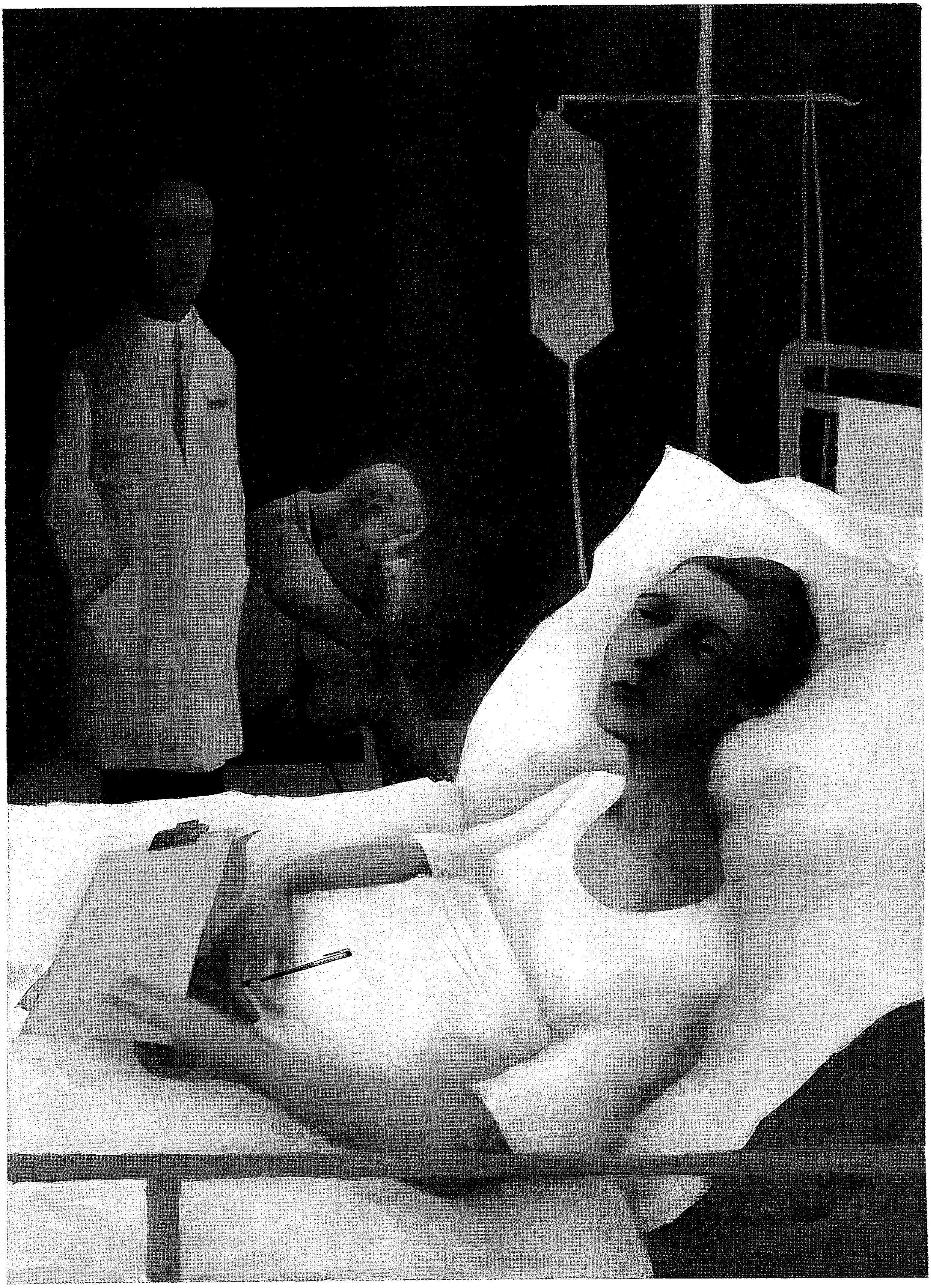
The decision was Lazaroff's.

THAT, in itself, is a remarkable fact. Only a decade ago, doctors made the decisions; patients did what they were told. Doctors did not consult patients about their desires and priorities, and routinely withheld information—sometimes crucial information, such as what drugs they were on, what treatments they were being given, and what their diagnosis was. Patients were even forbidden to look at their own medical records: it wasn't their property, doctors said. They were regarded as children: too fragile and simpleminded to handle the truth, let alone make decisions. And they suffered for it. People were put on machines, given drugs, and subjected to operations they would not have chosen. And they missed out on treatments that they might have preferred.

My father, a urologist who practices in Ohio, recounts that, through the seventies and much of the eighties, when men came to see him seeking vasectomies it was accepted that *he* would judge whether the surgery was not only medically appropriate but also personally appropriate for them. He routinely refused to do the operation if the men were unmarried, married but without children, or "too young." In retrospect, he's not sure he did right by all these patients, and, he says, he'd never do things this way today. In fact, he can't even think of a patient in the last few years whom he has turned down for a vasectomy.

One of the reasons for this dramatic shift in how decisions are made in medicine was a 1984 book, "The Silent World

ANA JUAN



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"I thought it had a pretty good story and interesting characters, but I really didn't like the font."

• •

of Doctor and Patient," by a Yale doctor and ethicist named Jay Katz. It was a devastating critique of traditional medical decision-making, and it had wide influence. In the book, Katz argued that medical decisions could and should be made by the patients involved. And he made his case using the stories of actual patients.

One was that of "Iphigenia Jones," a twenty-one-year-old woman who was found to have a malignancy in one of her breasts. Then, as now, she had two options: mastectomy (which would mean removing the breast and the lymph nodes of the nearby axilla) or radiation with minimal surgery (removing just the lump and the lymph nodes). Survival rates were equal, although in a spared breast the tumor can recur and ultimately make mastectomy necessary. This surgeon preferred doing mastectomies, and that's what he told her he'd do. In the days leading up to the operation, however, the surgeon developed misgivings about removing the breast of someone that young. So the night before the operation he did an unusual thing: he discussed the treatment options with her and let her choose. She chose the breast-preserving treatment.

Sometime later, both patient and surgeon appeared on a panel discussing treatment options for breast cancer. Their story drew a heated response. Surgeons almost uniformly attacked the idea that patients should be allowed to choose. As one surgeon asked, "If doctors have such trouble deciding which treatment is best, how can patients decide?" But, as Katz wrote, the decision involved not technical but personal issues: Which was more important to Iphigenia—the preservation of her breast or the security of living without a significant chance that the lump would grow back? No doctor was the authority on these matters. Only Iphigenia was. Yet in such situations doctors did step in, often not even asking about a patient's concerns, and make their own decisions—decisions perhaps influenced by money, professional bias (for example, surgeons tend to favor surgery), and personal idiosyncrasy.

Eventually, medical schools came around to Katz's position. By the time I attended, in the early nineties, we were taught to see patients as autonomous decision-makers. "You work for them," I was often reminded. There are still many old-school doctors who try to dictate from on high, but they are finding that patients won't put up with that anymore. Most doctors, taking seriously the idea that patients should control their own fates, lay out the options and the risks involved. A few even refuse to make recommendations, for fear of improperly influencing patients. Patients ask questions, look up information on the Internet, seek second opinions. And they decide.

In practice, however, matters aren't so straightforward. Patients, it turns out, make bad decisions, too. Sometimes, of course, the difference between one option and another isn't especially significant. But when you see your patient making a grave mistake, should you simply do what the patient wants? The current medical orthodoxy says yes. After all, whose body is it, anyway?

LAZAROFF wanted surgery. The oncologist was dubious about the choice, but she called in a neurosurgeon. The neurosurgeon, a trim man in his forties with a stellar reputation and a fondness for bow ties, saw Lazaroff and his son that afternoon. He warned them at length about how terrible the risks were and how limited the potential benefit. Sometimes, he told me later, patients just don't seem to hear the dangers, and in those cases he tends to be especially explicit about them—getting stuck on a ventilator because of poor lung function, having a stroke, dying. But Lazaroff wasn't to be dissuaded. The surgeon put him on the schedule.

"Mr. Lazaroff, I'm a surgical intern, and I'm here to talk to you about your surgery tomorrow," I said. "You're going to be having a thoracic spine corpectomy and fusion." He looked at me blankly. "This means that we will be removing the tumor compressing your spine," I said. His expression did not change. "The hope is that it will keep your paralysis from worsening."

"I'm not paralyzed," he said at last. "The surgery is so I *won't* become paralyzed."

I quickly retreated. "I'm sorry—I meant, keep you from becoming paralyzed." Perhaps this was just semantics—he could still move his left leg some. "I just need you to sign a permission form so you can have the surgery tomorrow."

The "informed-consent form" is a relatively recent development. It lists as many complications as we doctors can think of—everything from a mild allergic reaction to death—and, in signing it, you indicate that you have accepted these risks. It has the mark of lawyerdom and bureaucracy, and I doubt that patients feel any better informed after reading it. It does, however, provide an occasion to review the risks involved.

The neurosurgeon had already gone over them in detail. So I hit the highlights. "We ask for your signature so we're sure you understand the risks," I said. "Although you're having this done to preserve your abilities, the operation could fail or leave you paralyzed." I tried to sound firm without being harsh. "You could have a stroke or a heart attack or could even die." I held the form and a pen out to him.

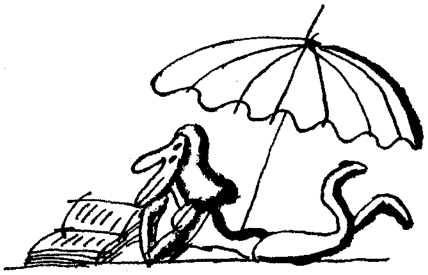
"No one said I could die from this," he said, tremulously. "It's my last hope. Are you saying I'm going to die?"

I froze, not knowing quite what to say. Just then, Lazaroff's son, whom I'll call David, arrived, with his wrinkled clothes, scraggly beard, and slight paunch. The father's mood changed abruptly, and I remembered from notes in the medical chart that David had recently raised the question with him of whether heroic measures were still appropriate. "Don't you give up on me," Lazaroff now rasped at his son. "You give me every chance I've got." He snatched the form and the pen from my hand. We stood, chastised and silent, as Lazaroff made a slow, illegible scrawl near the line for his signature.

Outside the room, David told me that he wasn't sure this was the right move. His mother had spent a long time in intensive care on a ventilator before dying of emphysema, and since then his father had often said that he did not want anything like that to happen to him. But now he was adamant about doing "everything." David did not dare argue with him.

Lazaroff had his surgery the next day. Once under anesthesia, he was rolled onto his left side. A thoracic surgeon made a long incision, opening into the chest cavity from the front around to the back along the eighth rib, slipped in a rib spreader, cranked it open, and then fixed in place a retractor to hold the deflated lung out of the way. You could see right down into the back of the chest to the spinal column. A fleshy, tennis-ball-size mass enveloped the tenth vertebra. The neurosurgeon took over and meticulously dissected around and under the tumor. It took a couple of hours, but eventually the tumor was attached only where it invaded the bony vertebral body. He then used a *rongeur*—a rigid, jawed instrument—to take small, painstaking bites in the vertebral body, like a beaver gnawing slowly through a tree trunk, ultimately removing the vertebra and, with it, the mass. To rebuild the spine, he filled the space left behind with a doughy plug of methacrylate, an acrylic cement, and let it slowly harden in place. He slipped a probe in behind the new artificial vertebra. There was plenty of space. It had taken more than four hours, but the pressure on the spinal cord was gone. The thoracic surgeon closed Lazaroff's chest, leaving a rubber chest tube jutting out to reinflate his lung, and he was wheeled into intensive care.

The operation was a technical success. Lazaroff's lungs wouldn't recover, however, and we struggled to get him off the ventilator. Over the next few days, they gradually became stiff and fibrotic, requiring higher ventilator pressures. We tried to keep him under sedation, but he frequently broke through and woke up wild-eyed and thrashing. David kept a despondent bedside vigil. Successive chest X-rays showed worsening lung damage. Small blood clots lodged in Lazaroff's lungs, and we put him on a blood thinner to prevent more clots from forming. Then some slow bleeding started—we weren't sure from where—and we had to give him blood transfusions almost daily. After a week, he began spiking fevers, but we couldn't find where the infection was. On the ninth day after the operation, the high ventilator pressures blew small holes in his lungs. We had to cut into his chest and insert an extra tube to keep his lungs from collapsing. The effort and expense it took to keep him going were enormous, the results dispiriting. It became apparent that our efforts were futile. It was exactly the way Lazaroff hadn't wanted to die—strapped down and sedated, tubes in every natural orifice and in several new ones, and on a ventilator. On the fourteenth day, David told the neurosurgeon that we should stop.



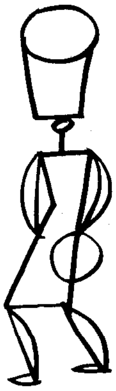
The neurosurgeon came to me with the news. I went to Lazaroff's I.C.U. room, one of eight bays arrayed in a semicircle around a nursing station, each with a tile floor, a window, and a sliding glass door that closed it off from the noise but not from the eyes of the nurses. A nurse and I slipped in. I checked to make sure that Lazaroff's morphine drip was turned up high. Taking my place at the bedside, I leaned close to him and, in case he could hear me, told him I was going to take the breathing tube out of his mouth. I snipped the ties securing the tube and deflated the balloon cuff holding it in his trachea. Then I pulled the tube out. He coughed a couple of times, opened his eyes briefly, and then closed them. The nurse suctioned out phlegm from his mouth. I turned the ventilator off, and suddenly the room was quiet except for the sound of his labored, gasping breaths. We watched as he tired out. His breathing slowed down until he took only occasional, agonal breaths, and then he stopped. I put my stethoscope on his chest and listened to his heart fade away. Thirteen minutes after I took him off the ventilator, I told the nurse to record that Joseph Lazaroff had died.

LAZAROFF, I thought, chose badly. Not, however, because he died so violently and appallingly. Good decisions can have bad results (sometimes people must take terrible chances), and bad decisions can have good results ("Better lucky than good," surgeons like to say). I thought Lazaroff chose badly because his choice ran against his deepest interests—interests not as I or anyone else conceived them but as he conceived them. Above all, it was clear that he wanted to live. He would take any risk—even death—to live. But, as we explained to him, life was not what we had to offer. We could offer only a chance of preserving minimal lower-body function for his brief remaining time—at a cost of severe violence to him and against extreme odds of a miserable death. But he did not hear us: in staving off paralysis, he seemed to believe that he might stave off death. There are people who will look clear-eyed at such odds and take their chances with surgery. But, knowing how much Lazaroff had dreaded dying the way his wife had, I do not believe he was one of them.

Could it have been a mistake, then, even to have told him about the surgical option? Our contemporary medical credo has made us exquisitely attuned to the requirements of patient autonomy. But there are still times—and they are more frequent than we readily admit—when a doctor has to steer patients to do what's right for themselves.

This is a controversial suggestion. People are rightly suspicious of those claiming to know better than they do what's best for them. But a good physician cannot simply stand aside when patients make bad or self-defeating decisions—decisions that go against their deepest goals.

I remember a case from my first weeks of internship. I was on the general surgical service, and among the patients I was responsible for was a woman in her fifties—I'll call her Mrs. McLaughlin—who had had a big abdominal operation just two days before. An incision ran the entire length of her belly. Fluids and pain medication dripped through an intravenous line into her arm. She was recovering according to schedule, but she wouldn't get out of bed. I explained why it was essential for her to get up and around: it cuts the risk of pneumonia, clot formation in leg veins, and other complications. She wasn't swayed. She was tired, she said, and didn't feel up to it. Did she understand that she was risking serious problems? Yes, she said. Just leave me be.



During rounds that afternoon, the chief resident asked me if the patient had got out of bed. Well, no, I said—she had refused. That's no excuse, the chief said, and she marched me back to Mrs. McLaughlin's room. The chief sat down on the edge of the bed and, as friendly as a country pastor, said, "Hi, how're you doing," made some small talk, took Mrs. McLaughlin by the hand, and then said, "It's time to get out of bed now." And I watched Mrs. McLaughlin get up without a moment's hesitation, shuffle over to a chair, plop herself down, and say, "You know, that wasn't so bad after all."

I had come into residency to learn how to be a surgeon. I had thought that meant simply learning the repertoire of moves and techniques involved in doing an operation or making a diagnosis. In fact, there was also the new and delicate matter of talking patients through their decisions—something that entailed its own repertoire of moves and techniques.

SUPPOSE you're a doctor. You're in an examination room of your clinic—one of those cramped spaces with fluorescent lights, a Matisse poster on the wall, a box of latex gloves on the counter, and a cold, padded patient table as centerpiece—seeing a female patient in her forties. She's a mother of two and a partner in a downtown law firm. Despite the circumstances, and the flimsy paper gown she's in, she manages to maintain her composure. You feel no mass or abnormality in her breasts. She had a mammogram before seeing you, and now you review the radiologist's report, which reads, "There is a faint group of punctate, clustered calcifications in the upper outer quadrant of the left breast that were not clearly present on the prior examination. Biopsy may be considered to exclude the possibility of malignancy." Translation: Worrisome features have appeared; they could mean breast cancer.

You tell her the news. Given the findings, you say, you think she ought to have a biopsy. She groans, and then stiffens. "Every time I see one of you people, you find something you want biopsied," she says. Three times in the past five years, her annual mammogram has revealed an area of "suspicious" calcifications. Three times a surgeon has taken her to the operating room and removed the tissue in question. And three times, under the pathologist's microscope, it has proved to be benign. "You just don't know when enough is enough," she says. "Whatever these specks are that keep turning up, they've proved to be normal." She pauses, and decides. "I'm not getting another goddam biopsy," she says, and she stands up to get dressed.

Do you let her go? It's not an unreasonable thing to do. She's an adult, after all. And a biopsy is not a small thing. Scattered across her left breast are three raised scars—one almost three inches long. Enough tissue has already been taken out that the left breast is distinctly smaller than the right one. And, yes, there are doctors who biopsy too much, who take out breast tissue on the most equivocal of findings. Patients are often right to push for explanations and second opinions.

Still, these calcifications are not equivocal findings. They often do indicate cancer. Now, if having control over one's life is to mean anything, people have to be permitted to make their own mistakes. But when the stakes are high, and the bad choice may be irreversible, doctors are reluctant to sit back. This is when they tend to push.

So push. Your patient is getting ready to walk out the door. You could stop her in her tracks and tell her she's making a big mistake. Give her a heavy speech about cancer. Point out the fallacy in supposing that three negative biopsies proves she's different. And in all likelihood you'll lose her. The aim isn't to show her how wrong she is. The aim is to win her over.

Notice what good doctors do. They don't jump right in. They step out for a minute and give her time to get dressed. Then they take her down to the office. It's more congenial there—comfortable chairs, a throw rug, family pictures all around. They sit her down. And, typically, they don't stand or assume the throne behind the big oak desk but pull up a chair and sit close beside her. As one surgical professor told me, when you sit close by, on the same level as your patients, you're no longer the rushed, bossy doctor with no time for them; patients feel less imposed upon and more inclined to think you're both on the same side of the issue.

The curious thing is that the doctors I've observed won't fuss or debate, even at this point. Instead, they have these strange, almost formulaic conversations with the patient, repeating, virtually word for word, what she tells them. "I see your point," they might say. "Every time you come in, we find something to biopsy. The specks keep coming up normal, but we never stop biopsying." Beyond this, these doctors say almost nothing until they're asked to. Oddly enough, nine times out of ten this approach works. People feel as if they've been heard, and have had an opportunity to vent. At this point, they finally begin to ask questions, voice doubts, even work through the logic themselves. And they come around.

A few still resist, and doctors will turn to other tactics. They enlist reinforcements. "Should we call the radiologist and see what he really thinks?" they might ask, or "Your husband's been out in the waiting room. Why don't we ask him to come in?" They might give her time "to think it over," knowing that people commonly waver and come around (though they don't let it go on too long). Sometimes they resort to subtler dynamics. When she says she's sticking to her decision, they might simply fall silent, letting their disappointment show. The seconds become a full minute. Then two. Before a thoughtful, sympathetic, and, yes, crafty physician, few patients will not eventually "choose" what the physician desires.

But it's misleading to view all this simply as the art of doctorly manipulation: when you see patients cede authority to the doctor, something else may be going on. The new orthodoxy about patient autonomy has a hard time acknowledging an awkward truth: patients frequently don't want the freedom that we've given them. That is, they're glad to have their autonomy respected, but the exercise of that autonomy means being able to relinquish it.

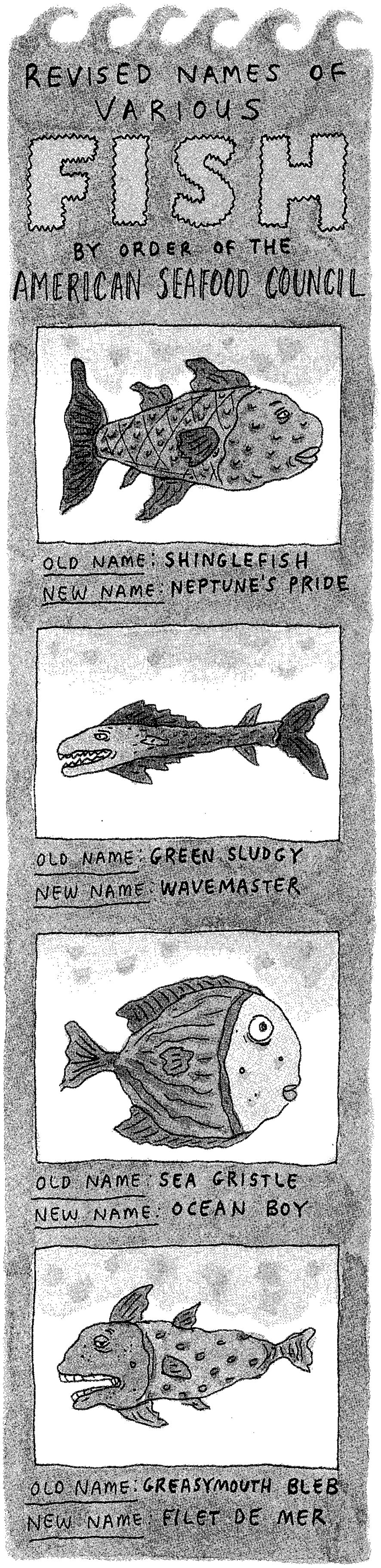
That's something I came to understand earlier this year. My youngest child, Hunter, was born five weeks early, weighing barely four pounds, and when she was eleven days old she stopped breathing. She had been home a week and doing well. That morning, however, she seemed irritable and fussy, and her nose ran. Thirty minutes after her feeding, her respiration became rapid, and she began making little grunting noises with each breath. Suddenly, Hunter stopped breathing. My wife, panicked, leaped up and shook Hunter awake, and the baby started breathing again. We rushed her to the hospital.

Fifteen minutes later, we were in a large, bright emergency-department examination room. With an oxygen mask on, Hunter didn't quite stabilize—she was still taking over sixty breaths a minute and expending all her energy to do it—but she regained normal oxygen levels in her blood and held her own. The doctors weren't sure what the cause of her troubles was. It could have been a heart defect, a bacterial infection, a virus. They took X-rays, blood, and urine, did an electrocardiogram, and tapped her spinal fluid. They suspected—correctly, as it turned out—that the problem was a simple respiratory virus that her lungs were too little and immature to handle. But the results from the cultures wouldn't be back for a couple of days. They admitted her to the intensive-care unit. That night, she began to tire out. She had several spells of apnea—periods of up to sixty seconds in which she stopped breathing, her heartbeat slowed, and she became pale and ominously still—but each time she came back, all by herself.

A decision needed to be made. Should she be intubated and put on a ventilator? Or should the doctors wait to see if she could recover without it? There were risks either way. If the team didn't intubate her now, under controlled circumstances, and she "crashed"—maybe the next time she would not wake up from an apneic spell—they would have to perform an emergency intubation, a tricky thing to do in a child so small. Delays could occur, the breathing tube could go down the wrong pipe, the doctors could inadvertently traumatize the airway and cause it to shut down, and then she might suffer brain damage or even die from lack of oxygen. The likelihood of such a disaster was slim but real. I myself had seen it happen. On the other hand, you don't want to put someone on a ventilator if you don't have to. Serious complications, such as pneumonia or the sort of lung blowout that Lazaroff experienced, happen frequently. And, as people who have been hooked up to one of these contraptions can tell you, the machine shoots air into and out of you with terrifying, uncomfortable force; your mouth becomes sore; your lips crack. Sedation is given, but the drugs bring complications, too.

So who should have made the choice? In many ways, I was the ideal candidate to decide what was best. I was the father, so I cared more than any hospital staffer ever could about which risks were taken. And I was a doctor, so I understood the issues involved. I also knew how often problems like miscommunication, overwork, and plain hubris could lead physicians to make bad choices.

And yet when the team of doctors came to talk to me about whether to intubate Hunter I wanted *them* to decide—doctors I had never met before. The ethicist Jay Katz and others have disparaged this kind of desire as



"childlike regression." But that judgment seems heartless to me. The uncertainties were savage, and I could not bear the possibility of making the wrong call. Even if I made what I was sure was the right choice for her, I could not live with the guilt if something went wrong. People like Katz believe that patients should be pushed to take responsibility for major decisions. But that would have seemed like a kind of harsh paternalism in itself. I needed Hunter's physicians to bear the responsibility: they could live with the consequences, good or bad.

I let the doctors make the call, and they did so on the spot. They would keep Hunter off the ventilator, they told me. And, with that, the bleary-eyed, stethoscope-collared pack shuffled onward to their next patient.

It turns out that patients commonly prefer to have others make their medical decisions. One study found that although sixty-four per cent of the general public thought they'd want to select their own treatment if they developed cancer, only twelve per cent of newly diagnosed cancer patients actually did want to do so.

Still, there was the nagging question: If I wanted the best decision for Hunter, was relinquishing my hard-won autonomy really the right thing to do? Carl Schneider, a professor of law and medicine at the University of Michigan, recently published a book called "The Practice of Autonomy," in which he sorted through a welter of studies and data on medical decision-making, even undertaking a systematic analysis of patients' memoirs. He found that the ill were often in a poor position to make good choices: they were frequently exhausted, irritable, shattered, or despondent. Often, they were just trying to get through their immediate pain, nausea, and fatigue; they could hardly think about major decisions. This rang true to me. I wasn't even the patient, and all I could do was sit and watch Hunter, worry, or distract myself with busywork. I did not have the concentration or the energy to weigh the treatment options properly.

Schneider found that physicians, being less emotionally engaged, are able to reason through the uncertainties without the distortions of fear and attachment. They work in a scientific culture that disciplines the way they make decisions. They have the benefit of "group rationality"—norms based on scholarly literature and refined practice. And they have the key relevant experience. Even though I am a doctor, I did not have the experience that Hunter's doctors had with her specific condition.

In the end, Hunter managed to stay off the ventilator, although she had a slow and sometimes scary recovery. At one point, less than twenty-four hours after the doctors had transferred her to a regular floor, her condition deteriorated and they had to rush her back to the I.C.U. She spent ten days in intensive care and two weeks in the hospital. But she went home in fine shape.

"Just don't come crawling back to me when I start becoming visible."

JUST as there is an art to being a doctor, there is an art to being a patient. You must choose wisely when to submit and when to assert yourself. Even when patients decide not to decide, they should still question their physicians and insist on explanations. I may have let Hunter's doctors take control, but I pressed them for a clear plan in the event that she should crash. Later, I worried that they were being too slow to feed her—she wasn't given anything to eat for more than a week, and I pestered them with questions as to why. When they took her off the oxygen monitor on her eleventh day in the hospital, I got nervous. What harm was there in keeping it on, I asked. I'm sure I was obstinate, even wrongheaded, at times. You do the best you can, taking the measure of your doctors and nurses and your own situation, trying to be neither too passive nor too pushy for your own good.

But the conundrum remains: If both doctors and patients are fallible, who should decide? We want a rule. And so we've decided that patients should be the ultimate arbiter. But such a hard-and-fast rule seems ill-suited both to a caring relationship between doctor and patient and to the reality of medical care, where a hundred decisions have to be made quickly. A mother is in labor: Should the doctor give hormones to stimulate stronger contractions? Should he or she break the bag of water? Should an epidural anesthetic be given? If so, at what point in labor? Are antibiotics needed? How often should the mother's blood pressure be checked? Should the doctor use forceps? Should the doctor perform an episiotomy? If things don't progress quickly, should the doctor perform a cesarean section? The doctor should not make all these decisions, and neither should the patient. Something must be worked out between them, one on one—a personal modus operandi.

Where many ethicists go wrong is in promoting patient autonomy as a kind of ultimate value in medicine rather than recognizing it as one value among others. Schneider found that what patients want most from doctors isn't autonomy per se; it's competence and kindness.

Now, kindness will often involve respecting patients' autonomy, assuring that they have control over vital decisions. But it may also mean taking on burdensome decisions when patients don't want them, or guiding patients in the right direction when they do. Even when patients do want to make their own decisions, there are times when the compassionate thing to do is to press, hard: to steer them to accept an operation or treatment that they fear, or forgo one that they'd pinned their hopes on. Many ethicists find this line of reasoning disturbing, and medicine will continue to struggle with how patients and doctors ought to make decisions. But, as the field grows ever more complex and technological, the real task isn't to banish paternalism; the real task is to preserve kindness.

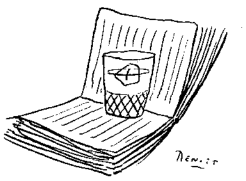
One more case, again from my internship year. The patient—I'll call him Mr. Howe—was in his late thirties, stout, bald, and with a muted, awkward manner. I wanted to turn the sound up when he spoke, and pictured him as someone who worked alone, perhaps as an accountant or a computer programmer. He was in the hospital following an operation for a badly infected gallbladder. Whenever I saw him, he wore the sad look of someone caged and he asked no questions. He could not wait to leave the hospital.

Late Saturday afternoon, maybe three days after his surgery, his nurse paged me. He had spiked a high fever and become short of breath. He didn't look well, she said.

I found him sweating profusely, his face flushed, eyes wide. He was sitting bent forward, propped up on his thick arms, panting. He had an oxygen mask on, and, even with the flow turned up to the maximum, the pulse-oximeter readings showed barely adequate oxygen levels in his blood. His heart was racing at well over a hundred beats a minute, and his blood pressure was much too low.

His wife, a small, thin, pale woman with lank black hair, stood to the side, rocking on her feet and hugging herself. I put on my decisive, confident-surgeon look, examined him, drew blood for tests and cultures, and asked the nurse to give him a bolus of intravenous fluid. Then I went out into the hall and paged S., one of the chief residents, for help.

When she called back, I filled her in on the details. I think he's septic, I said. Sometimes a bacterial infection gets into the bloodstream and triggers a massive, system-wide response: high fevers and dilation of the body's peripheral blood vessels, causing the skin to flush, the blood pressure to drop, and the heart to speed up. After abdominal surgery, a common cause of this is an infection of the surgical wound. But his incision was not red or hot or tender, and he had no pain in his belly. His lungs, however, had sounded like a washing machine when I listened with my stethoscope. Perhaps a pneumonia had started this disaster.



S. came right over. She was just past thirty, almost six feet tall, with short blond hair, athletic, exhaustingly energetic, and relentlessly can-do. She took one look at Howe and then murmured to the nurse to keep an intubation kit available at the bedside. I had started antibiotics, and the fluids had improved his blood pressure a bit, but he was still on maximal oxygen and working hard to maintain his breathing. She went over to him, put a hand on his shoulder, and asked how he was doing. It took a moment before he managed to reply. "Fine," he said—a silly answer to a silly question, but a conversation starter. She explained the situation: the sepsis, the likely pneumonia, and the probability that he would get worse before he got better. The antibiotics would fix the problem, but not instantly, she said, and he was tiring out quickly. To get him through it, she would need to put him to sleep, intubate him, and place him on a breathing machine.

"*No*," he gasped and sat straight up. "Don't . . . put me . . . on a . . . machine."

It would not be for long, she said. Maybe a couple of days. We'd give him sedatives so he'd be as comfortable as possible the whole time. And—she wanted to be sure he understood—without the ventilator he would die.

He shook his head. "No . . . machine!"

He was, we believed, making a bad decision—out of fear, maybe incomprehension. With antibiotics and some high-tech support, we had every reason to believe he'd recover fully. Howe had a lot to live for—he was young and otherwise healthy, and he had a wife and a child. Apparently, he thought so, too, for he had cared enough about his well-being to accept the initial operation. If not for the terror of the moment, we thought, he would have accepted the treatment. Could we be certain we were right? No, but if we *were* right could we really just let him die?

S. looked over at Howe's wife, who was stricken with fear and, in an effort to enlist her in the cause, asked what she thought her husband should do. She burst into tears. "I don't know, I don't know," she cried. "Can't you save him?" She couldn't take it anymore, and left the room. For the next few minutes, S. kept trying to persuade Howe. When it was clear that she was making no headway, she left to phone his attending surgeon at home, and then returned to the bedside. Soon Howe did tire out. He leaned back in his bed, pale, sweaty strands of hair sticking to his pate, oxygen levels dropping on the monitor. He closed his eyes, and he gradually fell into unconsciousness.

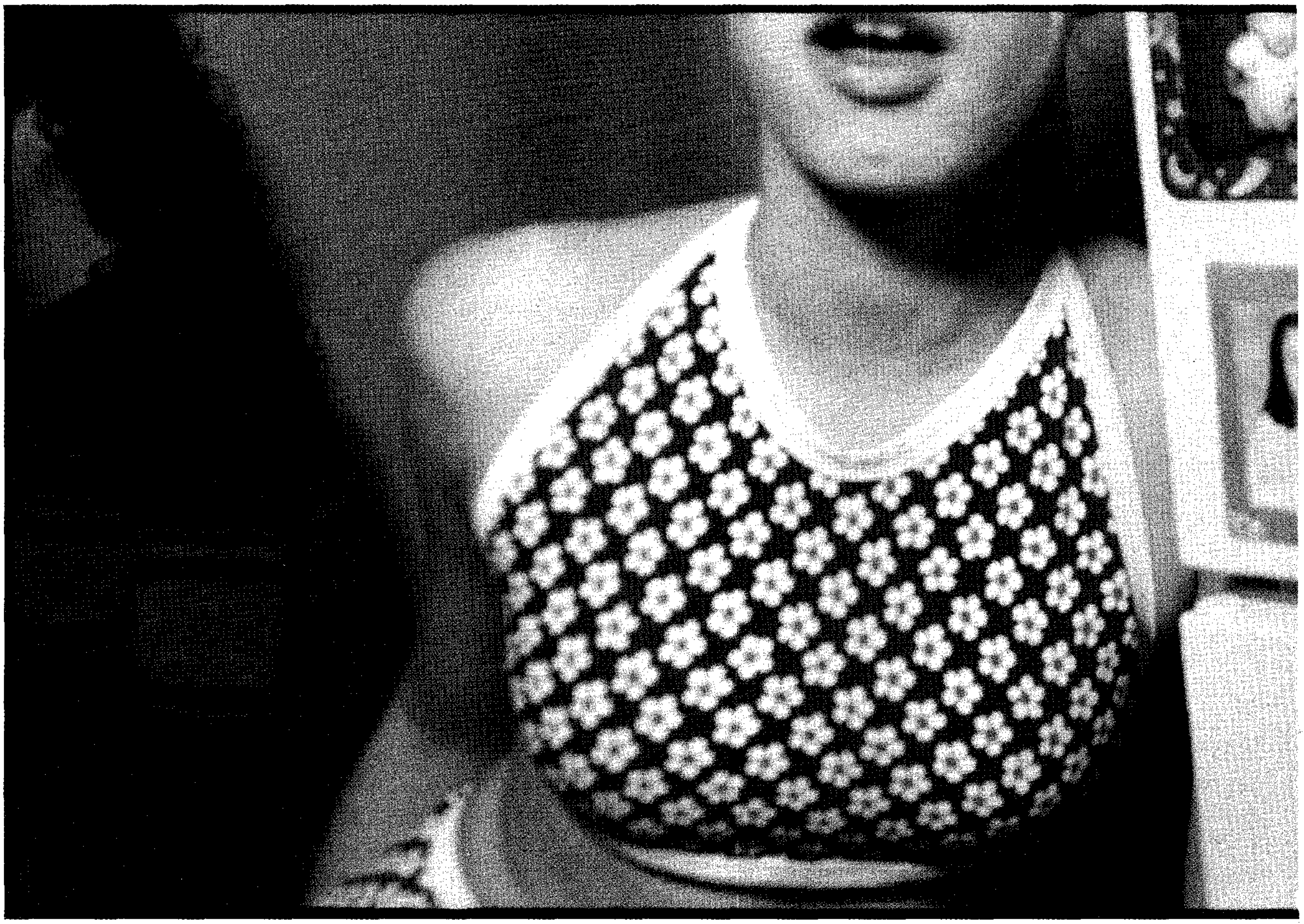
That was when S. went into action. She lowered the head of Howe's bed until he lay flat. She had a nurse draw up a tranquillizing agent and administer it in his I.V. She pressed a bag mask to his face and squeezed breaths of oxygen down into his lungs. Then I handed her the intubation equipment, and she slipped a long, clear plastic breathing tube down into his trachea on the first try. We wheeled Howe in his bed to the elevator and took him down a few floors to the intensive-care unit.

Later, I found his wife and explained that he was now on a ventilator in the I.C.U. She said nothing and went to see him.

Over the next twenty-four hours, his lungs improved markedly. We lightened up on the sedation and let him take over breathing from the machine. He woke up and opened his eyes, the breathing tube sticking out of his mouth. He did not struggle.

"I'm going to take this tube out of your mouth now, O.K.?" I said. He nodded. I cut the ties and deflated the balloon cuff holding the tube in place. Then I pulled it out, and he coughed violently a few times. "You had a pneumonia," I told him, "but you're doing just fine now."

I stood there, silent and anxious for a moment, waiting to see what he would say. He swallowed hard, wincing from the soreness. Then he looked at me, and, in a hoarse but steady voice, he said, "Thank you." ♦



ANGELA CAPPETTA

FICTION

NILDA

BY JUNOT DÍAZ

NILDA was my brother's girlfriend.

This is how all these stories begin.

She was Dominican from here and had super-long hair, like those Pentecostal girls, and a chest you wouldn't believe—I'm talking world-class. Rafa would sneak her down into our basement bedroom after our mother went to bed and do her to whatever was on the radio right then. The two of them had to let me stay, because if my mother heard me upstairs on the couch everybody's ass would have been fried. And since I wasn't about to spend my night out in the bushes this is how it was.

Rafa didn't make no noise, just a low something that resembled breathing. Nilda was the one. She seemed to be trying to hold back from crying the whole time. It was crazy hearing her like that. The Nilda I'd grown up with was one of the quietest girls you'd ever meet. She let her hair wall away her face and read "The New Mutants," and the only time she looked straight at anything was when she looked out a window.

But that was before she'd gotten that chest, before that slash of black hair had gone from something to pull on the bus to something to stroke in the dark. The new Nilda wore stretch pants and Iron Maiden shirts; she had already run away from her mother's and ended up at a group home; she'd already slept with Toño and Nestor and Little Anthony from Parkwood, older guys. She crashed over at our apartment a lot because she hated her moms, who was the neighborhood borracha. In the morning she slipped out before my mother woke up and found her. Waited for heads at the bus stop, fronted like she'd come from her own place, same clothes as the day before and greasy hair so everybody thought her a skank. Waited for my brother and didn't talk to anybody and nobody talked to her, because she'd always been one of those quiet, semi-retarded girls who you couldn't talk to without being dragged into a whirlpool of dumb stories. If Rafa decided that he wasn't going to school then she'd wait near our apartment until my mother left for work. Sometimes Rafa let her in right away. Sometimes he slept late and she'd wait across the street, building letters out of pebbles until she saw him crossing the living room.

She had big stupid lips and a sad moonface and the driest skin. Always rubbing lotion on it and cursing the moreno father who'd given it to her.

It seemed like she was always waiting for my brother. Nights she'd knock and I'd let her in and we'd sit on the couch while Rafa was off at his job at the carpet factory or working out at the gym. I'd show her my newest comics and she'd read them real close, but as soon as Rafa showed up she'd throw them in my lap and jump into his arms.

I missed you, she'd say in a little-girl voice, and Rafa would laugh. You should have seen him in those days: he had the face bones of a saint. Then Mami's door would open and Rafa would detach himself and cowboy-saunter over to Mami and say, You got something for me to eat, vieja? Claro que sí, Mami'd say, trying to put her glasses on.

He had us all, the way only a pretty nigger can.

Once when Rafa was late from the job and we were alone in the apartment a long time, I asked her about the group home. It was three weeks before the end of the school year and everybody had entered the Do-Nothing Stage. I was fourteen and reading "Dhalgren" for the second time; I had an I.Q. that would have broken you in two but I would have traded it in for a halfway decent face in a second.

It was pretty cool up there, she said. She was pulling on the front of her halter top, trying to air her chest out. The food was *bad* but there were a lot of cute guys in the house with me. They *all* wanted me.

She started chewing on a nail. Even the guys who worked there were calling me after I left, she said.

THE only reason Rafa went after her was because his last full-time girlfriend had gone back to Guyana—she was this dougla girl with a single eyebrow and skin to die for—and because Nilda had pushed up to him. She'd only been back from the group home a couple of months, but by then she'd already gotten a rep as a cuero. A lot of the Dominican girls in town were on some serious lockdown—we saw them on the bus and at school and maybe at the Pathmark, but since most families knew exactly what kind of tígueres were roaming the neighborhood these girls weren't allowed to hang out. Nilda was different. She was brown trash. Her moms was a mean-ass drunk and always running around South Amboy with her white boyfriends—which is a long way of saying Nilda could hang and, man, did she ever. Always out in the world, always cars stopping where she was smoking cigarettes. Before I even knew she was back from the group home she got scooped up by this older nigger from the back apartments. He kept her on his dick for almost four months, and I used to see them driving around in his fucked-up rust-eaten Sunbird while I delivered my papers. Motherfucker was like three hundred years old, but because he had a car and a record collection and foto albums from his Vietnam days and because he bought her clothes to replace the old shit she was wearing, Nilda was all lost on him.

I hated this nigger with a passion, but when it came to guys there was no talking to Nilda. I used to ask her, What's up with Wrinkle Dick? And she would get so mad she wouldn't speak to me for days, and then I'd get this note, *I want you to respect my man. Whatever*, I'd write back. Then the old cat bounced, no one knew where, the usual scenario in my neighborhood, and for a couple of months she got tossed by those cats from Parkwood. On Thursdays, which was comic-book day, she'd drop in to see what I'd picked up and she'd talk to me about how unhappy she was. We'd

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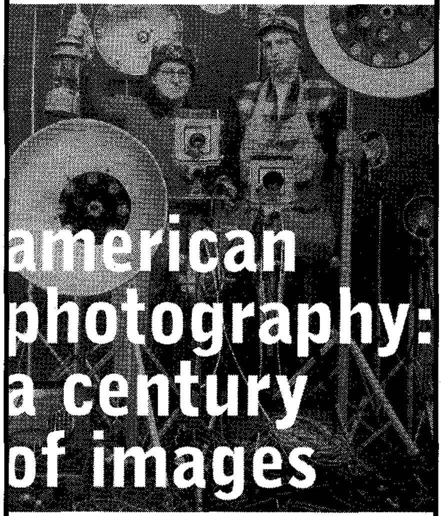

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sit together until it got dark and then her beeper would fire up and she'd peer into its display and say, I have to go. Sometimes I could grab her and pull her back on the couch, and we'd stay there a long time, me waiting for her to fall in love with me, her waiting for whatever, but other times she'd be serious. I have to go see my man, she'd say.

One of those comic-book days she saw my brother coming back from his five-mile run. Rafa was still boxing then and he was cut up like crazy, the muscles on his chest and abdomen so striated they looked like something out of a Frazetta drawing. He noticed her because she was wearing these ridiculous shorts and this tank that couldn't have blocked a sneeze and a thin roll of stomach was poking from between the fabrics and he smiled at her and she got real serious and uncomfortable and he told her to fix him some iced tea and she told him to fix it himself. You a guest here, he said. You should be earning your fucking keep. He went into the shower and as soon as he did she was in the kitchen stirring and I told her to leave it, but she said, I might as well. We drank all of it.

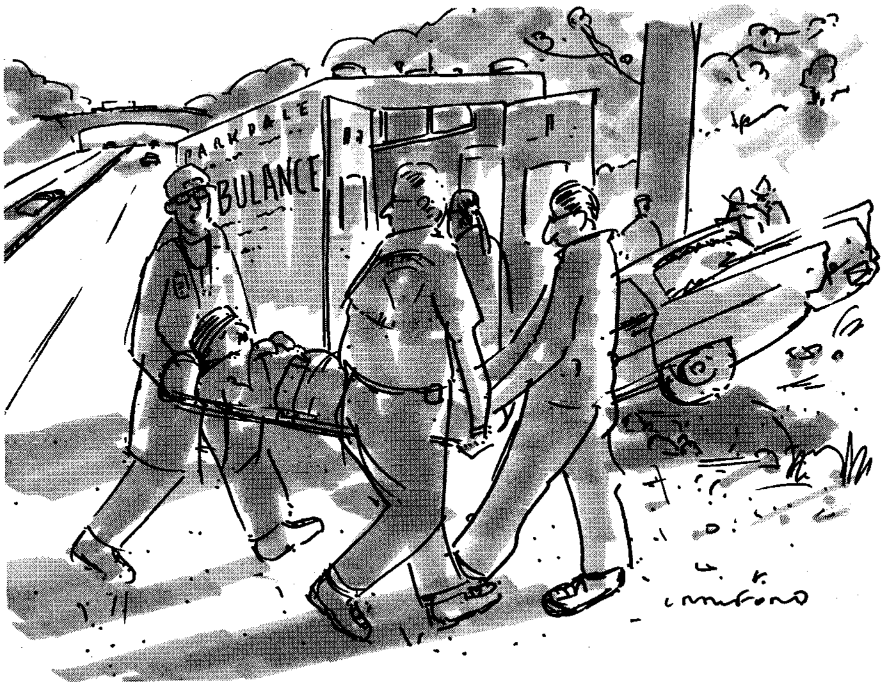
I wanted to warn her, tell her he was a monster, but she was already headed for him at the speed of light.

The next day Rafa's car turned up broken—what a coincidence—so he took the bus to school and when he was walking past our seat he took her hand and pulled her to her feet and she said, Get off me. Her eyes were pointed straight at the floor. I just want to show you something, he said. She was pulling with her arm but the rest of her was ready to go. Come on, Rafa said, and finally she went. Save my seat, she said over her shoulder, and I was like, Don't worry about it. Before we even swung onto 516 Nilda was in my brother's lap and he had his hand so far up her skirt it looked like he was performing a surgical procedure. When we were getting off the bus Rafa pulled me aside and held his hand in front of my nose. Smell this, he said. This, he said, is what's wrong with women.

You couldn't get anywhere near Nilda for the rest of the day. She had her hair pulled back and was glorious with victory. Even the white girls knew about my overmuscled about-to-be-a-senior brother and were impressed. And while Nilda sat at the end of our lunch table and whispered to some girls me and my boys ate our crap sandwiches and talked about the X-Men—this was back when the X-Men still made some kind of sense—and even if we didn't want to admit it the truth was now patent and awful: all the real dope girls were headed up to the high school, like moths to a light, and there was nothing any of us younger cats could do about it. My man José Negrón—a.k.a. Joe Black—took Nilda's defection the hardest, since he'd actually imagined he had a chance with her. Right after she got back from the group home he'd held her hand on the bus, and even though she'd gone off with other guys, he'd never forgotten it.

I was in the basement three nights later when they did it. That first time neither of them made a sound.

THEY went out that whole summer. I don't remember anyone doing anything big. Me and my pathetic little crew hiked over to Morgan Creek and swam around in water stinking of leachate from the landfill; we were just getting serious about the licks that year and Joe Black was stealing bottles out of his father's stash and we were drinking them down to the corners on the swings behind the apartments. Because of the heat and because of what I felt inside my chest a lot, I often just sat in the crib with my brother and Nilda. Rafa was tired all the time and pale: this had happened in a matter of days. I used to say, Look at you, white boy, and he used to say, Look at you, you black ugly nigger. He didn't feel like doing much, and besides his car had finally broken down for real, so we would all sit in the air-conditioned apartment and watch TV. Rafa had decided he wasn't going back to school for his senior year, and even though my moms was heartbroken and trying to guilt him into it five times a day, this was all he talked about. School had never been his gig, and after my pops left us for his twenty-five-year-old he didn't feel he needed to pretend any longer. I'd like to take a long fucking trip, he told us. See California before it slides into the ocean. California, I said. California, he said. A nigger could make a showing out there.



"Do we know for sure it's a concussion and not just a Keatsian swoon?"

• •

I'd like to go there, too, Nilda said, but Rafa didn't answer her. He had closed his eyes and you could see he was in pain.

We never talked about our father. I'd asked Rafa once, right at the beginning of the Last Great Absence, where he thought he was, and Rafa said, Like I fucking care.

End of conversation. World without end.

On days niggers were really out of their minds with boredom we trooped down to the pool and got in for free because Rafa was boys with one of the lifeguards. I swam, Nilda went on missions around the pool just so she could show off how tight she looked in her bikini, and Rafa sprawled under the awning and took it all in. Sometimes he called me over and we'd sit together for a while and he'd close his eyes and I'd watch the water dry on my ashy legs and then he'd tell me to go back to the pool. When Nilda finished promenading and came back to where Rafa was chilling she kneeled at his side and he would kiss her real long, his hands playing up and down the length of her back. Ain't nothing like a fifteen-year-old with a banging body, those hands seemed to be saying, at least to me.

Joe Black was always watching them. Man, he muttered, she's so fine I'd lick her asshole *and* tell you niggers about it.

Maybe I would have thought they were cute if I hadn't known Rafa. He might have seemed enamora'o with Nilda but he also had mad girls in orbit. Like this one piece of white trash from Sayreville, and this morena from Amsterdam Village who also slept over and sounded like a freight train when they did it. I don't remember her name, but I do remember how her perm shone in the glow of our night-light.

In August Rafa quit his job at the carpet factory—I'm too fucking tired, he complained, and some mornings his leg bones hurt so much he couldn't get out of bed right away. The Romans used to shatter these with iron clubs, I told him while I massaged his shins. The pain would kill you instantly. Great, he said. Cheer me up some more, you fucking bastard. One day Mami took him to the hospital for a checkup and afterward I found them sitting on the couch, both of them dressed up, watching TV like nothing had happened. They were holding hands and Mami appeared tiny next to him.

Well?

Rafa shrugged. The doc thinks I'm anemic.

Anemic ain't bad.

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Yeah, Rafa said, laughing bitterly. God bless Medicaid.

In the light of the TV, he looked terrible.

THAT was the summer when everything we would become was hovering just over our heads. Girls were starting to take notice of me; I wasn't good-looking but I listened and was sincere and had boxing muscles in my arms. In another universe I probably came out O.K., ended up with mad novias and jobs and a sea of love in which to swim, but in this world I had a brother who was dying of cancer and a long dark patch of life like a mile of black ice waiting for me up ahead.

One night, a couple of weeks before school started—they must have thought I was asleep—Nilda started telling Rafa about her plans for the future. I think even she knew what was about to happen. Listening to her imagining herself was about the saddest thing you ever heard. How she wanted to get away from her moms and open up a group home for runaway kids. But this one would be real cool, she said. It would be for normal kids who just got problems. She must have loved him because she went on and on. Plenty of people talk about having a flow, but that night I really heard one, something that was unbroken, that fought itself and worked together all at once. Rafa didn't say nothing. Maybe he had his hands in her hair or maybe he was just like, Fuck you. When she finished he didn't even say wow. I wanted to kill myself with embarrassment. About a half hour later she got up and dressed. She couldn't see me or she would have known that I thought she was beautiful. She stepped into her pants and pulled them up in one motion, sucked in her stomach while she buttoned them. I'll see you later, she said.

Yeah, he said.

After she walked out he put on the radio and started on the speed bag. I stopped pretending I was asleep; I sat up and watched him.

Did you guys have a fight or something?

No, he said.

Why'd she leave?

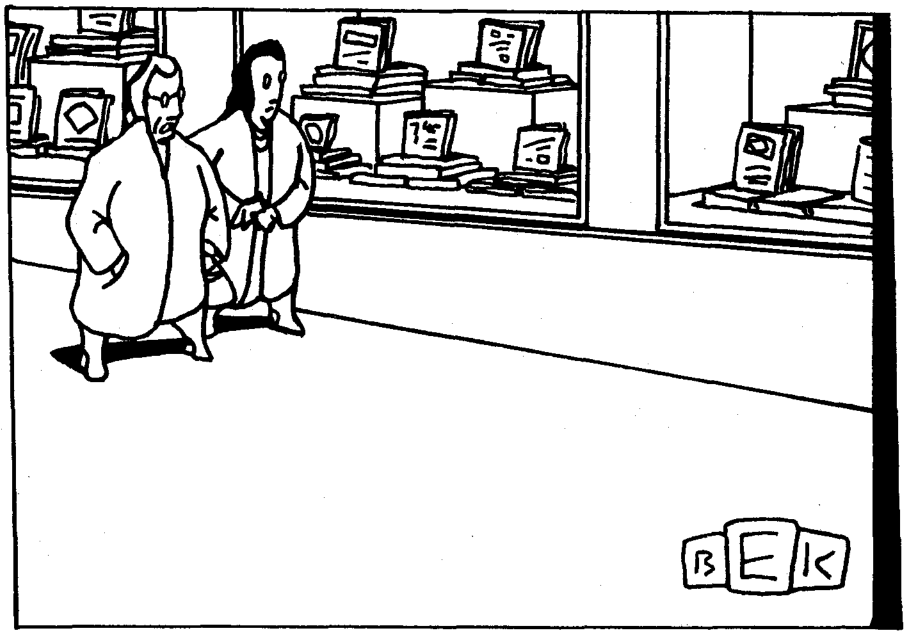
He sat down on my bed. His chest was sweating. She had to go.

But where's she gonna stay?

I don't know. He put his hand on my face, gently. Why ain't you minding your business?

A week later he was seeing some other girl. She was from Trinidad, a coco pañyol, and she had this phony-as-hell English accent. It was the way we all were back then. None of us wanted to be niggers. Not for nothing.

I GUESS two years passed. My brother was gone by then, and I was on my way to becoming a nut. I was out of school most of the time and had no friends and I sat inside and watched Univisión or walked down to the dump and smoked the mota I should have been selling until I couldn't see. Nilda



"I do want to solve all my problems, but I'll wait till it comes out in soft cover."

didn't fare so well, either. A lot of the things that happened to her, though, had nothing to do with me or my brother. She fell in love a couple more times, really bad with this one moreno truck driver who took her to Manalapan and then abandoned her at the end of the summer. I had to drive over to get her, and the house was one of those tiny box jobs with a fifty-cent lawn and no kind of charm; she was acting like she was some Italian chick and offered me a joint in the car, but I put my hand on hers and told her to stop it. Back home she fell in with more stupid niggers, relocated kids from the City, and they came at her with drama and some of their girls beat her up, a Brick City beat-down, and she lost her bottom front teeth. She was in and out of school and for a while they put her on home instruction, and that was when she finally dropped.

My junior year she started delivering papers so she could make money, and since I was spending a lot of time outside I saw her every now and then. Broke my heart. She wasn't at her lowest yet but she was aiming there and when we passed each other she always smiled and said hi. She was starting to put on weight and she'd cut her hair down to nothing and her moonface was heavy and alone. I always said Wassup and when I had cigarettes I gave them to her. She'd gone to the funeral, along with a couple of his other girls, and what a skirt she'd worn, like maybe she could still convince him of something, and she'd kissed my mother but the vieja hadn't known who she was. I had to tell Mami on the ride home and all she could remember about her was that she was the one who smelled good. It wasn't until Mami said it that I realized it was true.

It was only one summer and she was nobody special, so what's the point of all this? He's gone, he's gone, he's gone. I'm twenty-three and I'm washing my clothes up at the minimall on Ernston Road. She's here with me—she's folding her shit and smiling and showing me her missing teeth and saying, It's been a long time, hasn't it, Yunior?

Years, I say, loading my whites. Outside the sky is clear of gulls, and down at the apartment my moms is waiting for me with dinner. Six months earlier we were sitting in front of the TV and my mother said, Well, I think I'm finally over this place.

Nilda asks, Did you move or something?

I shake my head. Just been working.

God, it's been a long, long time. She's on her clothes like magic, making everything neat, making everything fit. There are four other people at the counters, broke-ass-looking niggers with knee socks and croupier's hats and scars snaking up their arms, and they all seem like sleepwalkers compared with her. She shakes her head, grinning. Your brother, she says.

Rafa.

She points her finger at me like my brother always did.

I miss him sometimes.

She nods. Me, too. He was a good guy to me.

I must have disbelief on my face because she finishes shaking out her towels and then stares straight through me. He treated me the best.

Nilda.

He used to sleep with my hair over his face. He used to say it made him feel safe.

What else can we say? She finishes her stacking, I hold the door open for her. The locals watch us leave. We walk back through the old neighborhood, slowed down by the bulk of our clothes. London Terrace has changed now that the landfill has shut down. Kicked-up rents and mad South Asian people and white folks living in the apartments, but it's our kids you see in the streets and hanging from the porches.

Nilda is watching the ground as though she's afraid she might fall. My heart is beating and I think, We could do anything. We could marry. We could drive off to the West Coast. We could start over. It's all possible but neither of us speaks for a long time and the moment closes and we're back in the world we've always known.

Remember the day we met? she asks.

I nod.

You wanted to play baseball.

It was summer, I say. You were wearing a tank top.

You made me put on a shirt before you'd let me be on your team. Do you remember?

I remember, I say.

We never spoke again. A couple of years later I went away to college and I don't know where the fuck she went. ♦

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THE CRITICS

A CRITIC AT LARGE

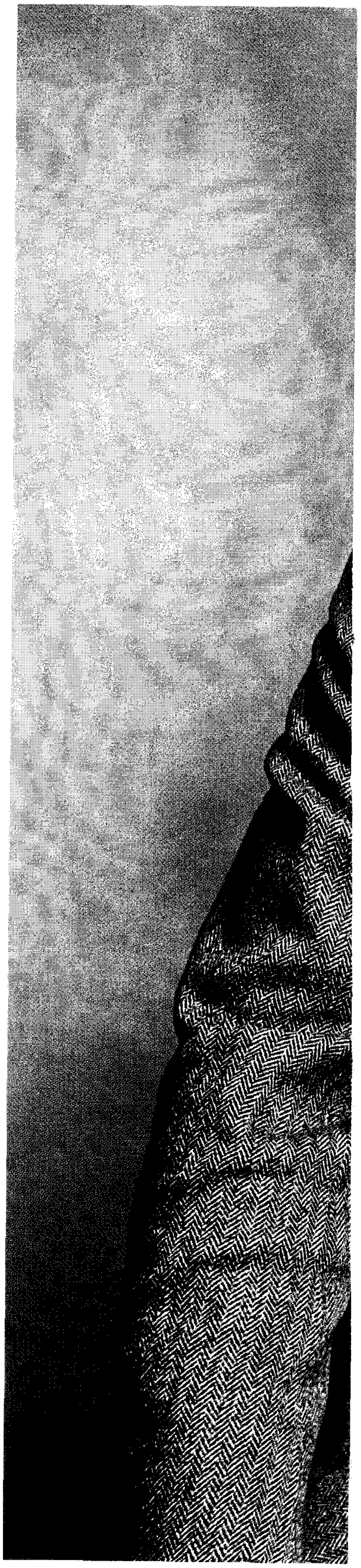
WAUGH IN PIECES

Cruelty and compassion mingle in the short stories of a master.

BY ANTHONY LANE

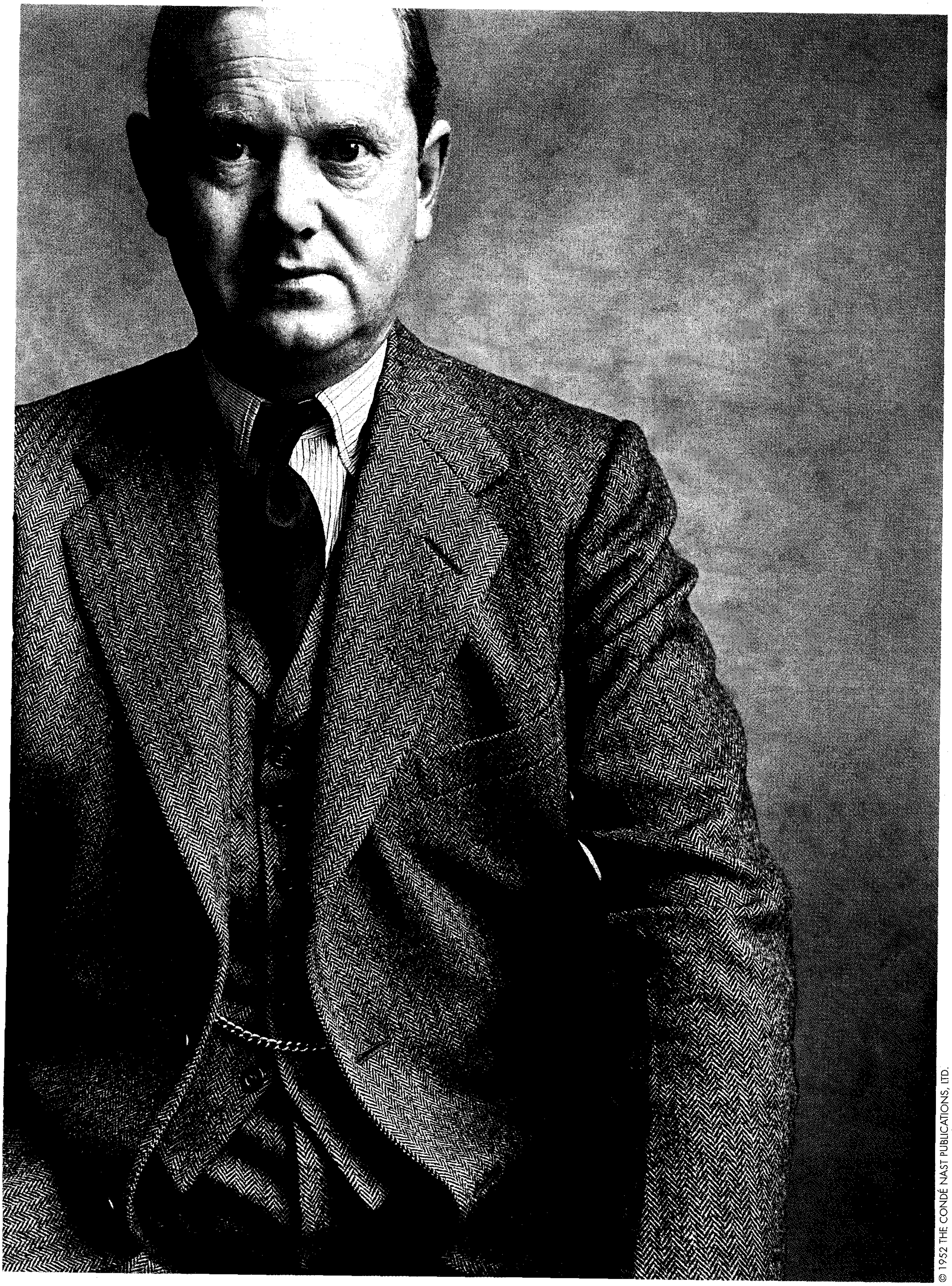
In July, 1956, Evelyn Waugh gave a dinner party for his daughter Teresa. In anticipation of the event, he wrote to a friend, Brian Franks, with a description of the menu, closing with the words "Non Vintage champagne for all but me." Rarely has an edict been issued with such a firm smack of the lips, yet nothing could be sadder. At Oxford in the nineteen-twenties, Waugh had chosen his friends on the basis of their ability to handle, or entertainingly mishandle, the effects of alcohol; "an excess of wine nauseated him and this made an insurmountable barrier between us," he wrote of one college acquaintance. Now, thirty years later, he would sit in solitude, grasping his glass, bullishly proud that there was nobody present who deserved to share a drop. The hint is clear enough: Waugh, and Waugh alone, was of vintage stuff.

The years since Waugh's death, in 1966—and, in particular, the past decade—have been marked by studious attempts to savor his achievements. We have had biographies in two volumes from Martin Stannard and in one volume from Selina Hastings; more recent, and more slender still, is David Wykes's "Evelyn Waugh: A Literary Life," which bravely introduces us to the new adjective "Wavian"—helpful to scholars, perhaps, but unlikely to gain a wider currency. Best of all, we have a fresh gathering of primary material: "The Complete Stories of Evelyn Waugh" (Little, Brown; $29.95). The title is clear, although in the Waugh canon a short story is not easily defined. The unfinished yet gracefully rounded tale "Work Suspended," for instance, which consumes eighty-four pages of the present book, feels almost a match for "The Loved One," "Helena," and "The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold"—the brisk, peppery, death-haunted trio of novellas that Waugh produced in his riper years, and which are available only in individual volumes. He himself was a chronic bibliophile and a connoisseur of typography, who was admired in his youth for his capacity to illustrate rather than compose a text, and his fussing is contagious; as a rule, I am quite happy to read any cruddy old softback with splinters of wood pulp poking out of the pages, yet I treat my early edition of "Vile Bodies," with its vibrantly woodblocked title page, like a frail and endangered pet. The craving for Waugh can come upon one without warning, especially when the tide of public folly or private slush rises to flood level, but I resent having to slake my need with an emergency Penguin. The new batch of short fiction is a necessary purchase, and you should be able to claim it against tax as an aid to professional sanity, but the I.R.S. might frown at the luridly whimsical dust jacket offered by Little, Brown. The hushed grays of the En-



PHOTOGRAPH BY IRVING PENN

Evelyn Waugh in 1950: His nostalgia for abandoned glories was matched only by his relish for current catastrophe.



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The choice, nevertheless, is instructive. Is Waugh in hock to the riots that he records, or does he purvey a more Apollonian calm? Is "Vile Bodies," his Anglo-Saxon chronicle of the nineteen-twenties, the last word in madcap, or does it represent the lethally coherent findings of an onlooker? Max Beerbohm once labelled himself a "Tory Anarchist," and the tag hangs well on Waugh, too; his nostalgia for abandoned glories (largely of his own devising) was matched only by his relish for current catastrophe. It is never enough, whatever the temptation, to mock the age in which you live; the mockery must continue to peal, like an echoing bell, long after the objects of your scorn have been decently laid to rest. Take the cruise liner; now little more than a floating mall for the retired and the tan-crazy, it was once a decorous addition to the Grand Tour, tricked out with just enough raffishness and cultural ambition to lure the satirically minded. Waugh got a whole book, "Labels," out of a Mediterranean cruise that he took in 1929, and, four years on, he distilled the swaying, semi-nauseated atmosphere of those days into six pages:

> so we had champagne for dinner and were jolly and they threw paper streamers and I threw mine before it was unrolled and hit Miss P. on the nose. Ha ha. So feeling matey I said to the steward isnt this fun and he said yes for them who hasnt got to clear it up goodness how Sad.

If you had to pick a single Waugh word—the syllable that registers his demeanor as reliably as the "Sir" of Dr. Johnson—it would be "so." Designed to establish a causal connection, it may equally gesture toward a run of events so fluid that cause and effect can be found giggling under the table. The hurler of paper streamers is a case in point; beneath the chirpiness, her emotional logic is on its last legs. The passage comes from "Cruise: Letters from a Young Lady of Leisure," and it skewers a small world as cleanly as anything in "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes"; you could argue that comic ventriloquists such as Waugh and Anita Loos are among the most zestful descendants of Joyce—at least, of the Joyce who spoke in the tongue of Molly Bloom. Waugh detested "Ulysses"; I once heard him, during a television interview, decry it as "gibberish" with a hard "g"; but, as many of the stories make clear, the caddish young novelist was not averse to pilfering any modernist techniques that could be of service. The cinematic clamor of competing voices in "Vile Bodies" bears traces of the pub talk in "The Waste Land"; you can still hear it in "Excursion in Reality," written in 1932, with its clicking exchange of dry-hearted lovers:

> "I say, was I beastly tonight?"
> "Lousy."
> "Well, I thought you were lousy too."
> "Never mind. See you sometime."
> "Aren't you afraid to go on talking?"
> "Can't, I'm afraid. I've got to do some work."
> "*Simon*, what *can* you mean?"

Note the absence of guidelines: no "he said," or "she replied." Note, moreover, how little you need them; never in a Waugh conversation do you have to backtrack and work out who is speaking. (Try this some day in the privacy of your own writing, and see how hard it is.) The tones are tethered tightly to character, yet at the same time they seem to float upward like a plainsong of fatigue.

The miracle of Evelyn Waugh is that withering cannot age him. The "Complete Stories" comprises nearly six hundred pages of weariness, withdrawal, disappointment, tweediness, harrumphing snobbery, and flashes of red-faced rage; by rights, the book should grind you down in gloom, instead of which you emerge braced and bolstered, as if by a cold shower and a cocktail. There are thirty-eight tales in all, composed over fifty-two years. Some will be familiar, having been corralled in "Work Suspended and Other Stories"; others, including a trove of juvenilia, were never easy to unearth, and it is gratifying to find them so readily to hand. The earliest effort, written in 1910 and new to me, is "The Curse of the Horse Race." It is thrilling stuff:

> On they went aintil they were face to face with each other. the peliesman lept from his horse only to be stabed to the hart by Rupert then Tom jumped down and got Rupert a smart blow on the cheak.

Not bad for a seven-year-old. Such boyish taste for Victorian melodrama was hardly uncommon; one surprising revelation of "The Complete Stories of Evelyn Waugh" is that the adult storyteller never shook it out of his system. We are so accustomed to the legend of Waugh the patient craftsman—or, less happily, to the honeyed ruminations in which "Brideshead Revisited" gets stuck—that we tend to neglect his talent for whipping a tale along. There may be no unsung masterpieces in this latest volume, but nor is there the slightest temptation to skip, and some of Waugh's openings leave you ravenous for further particulars: "The marriage of Tom Watch and Angela Trench-Troubridge was, perhaps, as unimportant an event as has occurred within living memory." Or, "John Verney married Elizabeth in 1938, but it was not until the winter of 1945 that he came to hate her steadily and fiercely."

Marital friction, or the farce of wedded lethargy, was one of Waugh's enduring obsessions; he himself married a woman named Evelyn Gardner in 1928. They were known as He-Evelyn and She-Evelyn: the perfect couple, at least until the following year, when she fell in love with another man. Waugh filed a petition for divorce in September, 1929, and it is a commonplace of Waugh criticism to point out that his fiction was henceforth stained by the rich mortification of the cuckold. Tom Watch and Angela Trench-Troubridge can't even make it through their honeymoon without adultery rearing its tousled head. Tom alights from their train ride to the country, gets left behind, meets an old school friend whose name he can't remember, drinks, hunts, and gets lost; Angela arrives too late to find him there, but thrives anyway. ("*Quite all right,*" she cables. "*Your friend divine. Why not join us here.*") Nothing is stated, but we learn in passing that the young bride is thinking of taking a cottage out of town.

This sly history of betrayal, "Love in the Slump," was created in 1932, three years after Waugh's own downfall. The whole thing clips along with the curtness of a telegram; under the pressure of his own fury, the young writer had discovered a species of suffering that he could be funny about. Turn to the back of the book, however, and the chronology of humiliation hits a bump. There you will find a ragbag of fiction from Waugh's time at Oxford, including a cod-historical romance called "Antony, Who Sought Things That Were Lost." I naturally warmed to the title, but the story doesn't really come alive until the death rattle of the last page. Count Antony is imprisoned with his betrothed, the Lady Elizabeth: "And they made a bed of straw on the step and thus among the foul and creeping things was their marriage made." The Lady soon tires of her paramour and looks for a replacement. The only candidate is the pockmarked jailer; she makes love to him in full view of the agued Antony, who then rises up in silence and throttles her. Five years after the creation of this cheerful scene, Waugh entered the holy estate of matrimony.

One should not read too much into the excesses of youth; it does seem, though, that Waugh the undergraduate was preparing himself, consciously or otherwise, for a lifelong scrutiny of bad faith. The whole point of excess was that it should be reported; if you indulged in it personally, good for you, but your pleasure still awaited the cool stroke of a pen and the careful coloring of exaggeration. The joys of "Decline and Fall," as of the early stories and the barbarous deadpan of the letters, are those of drunkenness recollected in sobriety; even the perpetration of serious crimes seems to be leavened, if not pardoned, by the punctiliousness of the prose. In the 1923 story "Edward of Unique Achievement," an undergraduate murders his tutor for no better reason than that he dislikes him. The slaughter is blamed on a fellow-student, Lord Poxe, who is censured by the Warden with the words "It was a foolish act, Lord Poxe, an act of wanton foolishness, but I do not wish to be hard on you. . . . Lady Emily Crane, your great aunt, you will remember, married a Mr Arthur Thorn, my grandfather. I feel that the College owes it to your position to treat this matter as discreetly as possible." Poxe is fined thirteen shillings.

All of Waugh is there in bud: the rude names, the wrongful accusation, the clashing rocks of good behavior and evil deeds, and the lunatic conviction that human worth can be measured by genealogy. (There are moments in "Brideshead" when Waugh, devoutly in

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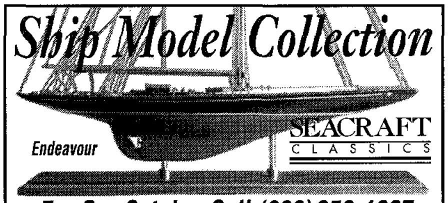
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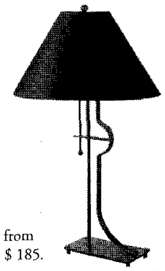

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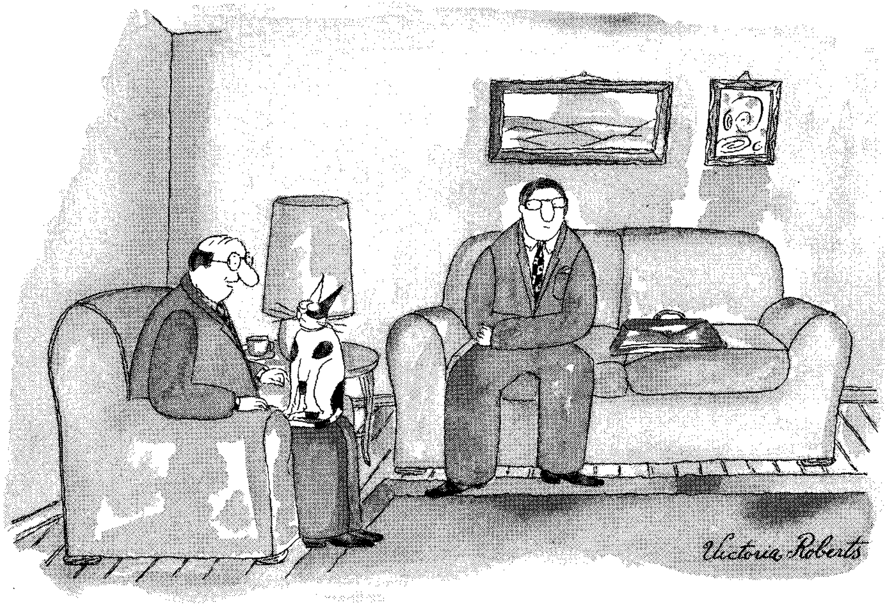
love with the fine old Catholic name of Marchmain, veers ominously close to the Warden.) Like Lord Poxe, the author himself never killed anyone, although he once made a hapless attempt on his own life, swimming out to sea from the Welsh coast; as he recalls in his autobiography, he met a shoal of jellyfish and turned back. (It's a fine joke against himself; only the thoroughly spineless would be deterred by invertebrates.) "All fates are 'worse than death,'" he noted in his diary in 1963, and he delighted in submitting his characters to unlikely varieties of doom and dénouement. "The Balance" (1926) imagines its hero downing a blue bottle of poison; the aging Irish hostess of "Bella Fleace Gave a Party" (1932) expires a day after her extravagant but unattended ball, the invitations to which she forgot to put in the mail; the heroine of "On Guard" (1934) is guaranteed a dismal spinsterhood when her jealous poodle, Hector, in a bid to repel all suitors, bites off her ravishing nose.

Then there is McMaster, otherwise known as "The Man Who Liked Dickens." The story was written in 1933, but it had taken root the year before, when Waugh, who spent much of the nineteen-thirties in a punishing series of explorations, stumbled across a desolate Brazilian ranch and discovered Mr. Christie. With his loosely extended family, curious theories on the doctrine of the Trinity, and a winning way with rum and lime, Christie was a gift; he stewed in Waugh's mind and emerged as McMaster, who dopes an English visitor, Paul Henty, with strong brews and never lets him go. In reality, Waugh set out freely after a night in Christie's company; but reality was always too meagre for the writer's liking, and he made it the business of his fiction to think along paths not taken—to wonder just how infernally, with a little help from mischance and a touch of sunstruck malice, life might have turned out. And so "The Man Who Liked Dickens" underwent a final fermentation, and became the penultimate chapter of "A Handful of Dust," with Henty becoming Tony Last—another dreamy cuckold on the run—and McMaster retransfigured into the morbidly named Mr. Todd, requesting one more recitation of "Little Dorrit" from his helpless guest.

It is as plausible a portrait of damnation as you could wish for; even now, however, we have not reached the end of the affair. "The Complete Stories of Evelyn Waugh" has an eight-page offering, "By Special Request," that was used as a quiet climax to the serialized version of "A Handful of Dust." This time, there is no Brazil; no Christie, no McMaster, no Todd; merely the glum prospect of Tony returning to his errant wife, and the resumption of their stony existence. "All the old faces," she remarks as they sit down in a new restaurant, amid the tribal savagery of a London lunch. The story ends with Tony taking over the apartment that his wife had found so useful for infidelity. Again, we are left to fill in the details, but it is a good bet that the cycle of deceit will lurch into motion all over again. To the comfortless, Waugh offers little more than a choice of living death: malarial mire or furnished flat? A delicious story of 1932, "Incident in Azania," makes the parallel explicit, and sniggers at the blessings of civilization:

> Far away in the interior, in the sunless secret places, where a twisted stem across the jungle track, a rag fluttering to the bough of a tree, a fowl headless and full spread by an old stump marked the taboo where no man might cross, the Sakuya women chanted their primeval litany of initiation; here on the hillside the no less terrible ceremony was held over Mrs Lepperidge's tea table.

THIS balanced disdain must be kept in mind as we enter the treacherous terrain that is ruled by Waugh the snob. A skim through his journals will provide ample proof that he was a racist, anti-Semitic, misogynist reactionary; but that is the trouble with skimming. The deeper you plunge into him, the more you realize that no one was spared the knife. His novels rejoice in the fact that the sinned against are as open to the attentions of satire as the sinning. Having joined the Catholic Church in 1930, Waugh saw no reason to be softer on the shortcomings of others than he was on his own. The trouble with liberalism, for example—and one can hardly begin to imagine the fun that Waugh would have had with the political dispensations of today—was that it provided unfair exemptions to original sin. If he laughed at the mimicry of European customs which he saw at the coronation of Haile Selassie, and



"Yes, he is a pet detective, and he's here on business."

• •

which found full expression in "Black Mischief," how much harder he laughed at the inability of Europeans to unbend in the presence of the alien. Waugh is fond of Mr. Youkoumian, the Armenian fixer who pops up in "Incident in Azania" and, later, in the pages of "Black Mischief," but his real venom is reserved for the English community: "It did them good to find a foreigner who so completely fulfilled their ideal of all that a foreigner should be."

As the years progressed, Waugh himself swelled into the sort of Englishman who fulfilled a foreigner's ideal of all that an Englishman, if left rank and unweeded, might become. It was a sight guaranteed (and probably designed) to perplex the nineteen-fifties: pink and apoplectic, armed with cigar and ear trumpet, Waugh laid into the decline of modern manners with ill-mannered contempt. No one who claimed to prefer his books to his children ("A child is easily replaced") can have been *that* easy to love, and his journal adds to the insult, describing his own brood—he had six children by his second wife, Laura—as "feckless, destructive, frivolous, sensual, humorless." All in all, the privilege of reading Waugh is rivalled only by the relief of never having had to encounter such a rare, irascible beast in person; the privilege is all the more acute because, with age, his fiction starts to shimmer with self-consciousness—a quickened Falstaffian shame, far beyond the reach of your average club bore—about the monstrous figure that he knows he must cut. That is why this volume contains no senilia. "Basil Seal Rides Again," written three years before Waugh's death, is crisp with mischief and suffused with wintry regret:

> His voice was not the same instrument as of old. He had first assumed it as a conscious imposture; it had become habitual to him; the antiquated, worldly-wise moralities which, using that voice, he had found himself obliged to utter, had become his settled opinions.

Reading this, you ask yourself what manner of fear and uncertainty could lead someone—especially so lithe a social animal as the young Waugh—to wall himself in against the assaults, real and imaginary, of a hostile world. Waugh's biographer Martin Stannard passes a particularly harsh sentence: "His art was a theatre of cruelty; his temperament instinctively uncharitable." That sounds decisive, but it drags Waugh toward the arena of Artaud and Genet, where he most definitely does not belong. For one thing, his unkindness is made compelling by the pitch and frequency of his jokes—seldom registered by Stannard, whose industry is untroubled by humor. Dip at random into the letters, some of which are right up there with the great wit-shows of

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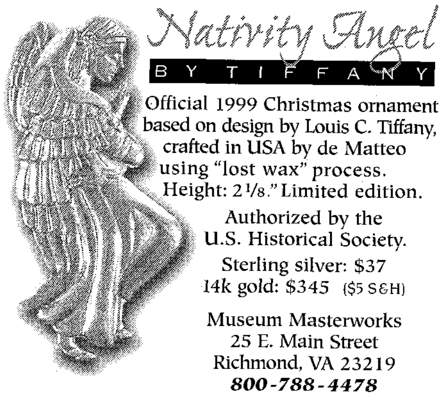
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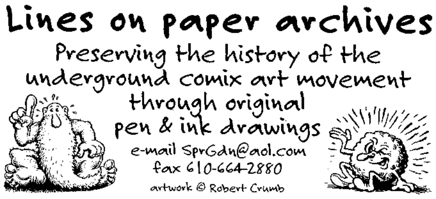
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Horace Walpole and Sydney Smith, and you will immediately stumble upon plain events blooming into the surreal. When Lady Mary Lygon was elected to the London Library in 1946 (not a major achievement), Waugh wrote to congratulate her:

> I hope you will always remember to behave yourself with suitable decorum in those grave precincts. Always go to the closet appointed for the purpose if you wish to make water. Far too many female members have lately taken to squatting behind the Genealogy section. Never write 'balls' with an indelible pencil on the margins of the books provided. Do not solicit the female librarians to acts of unnatural vice.

Is this "instinctively uncharitable"? I think I smell the milk of human kindness: faintly curdled, perhaps, but brimming with licentious glee. During the Second World War, the novelist was described by his commanding officer as "so unpopular as to be unemployable," yet he was also a byword for physical courage, and, in the years that followed, his cruelty began to be infiltrated, if not by charity, at least by a nagging sense of those occasions which would be improved by goodness and mercy. The "Sword of Honour" trilogy, published between 1952 and 1961, is a masterpiece of ruefulness; who but Waugh could have woven the surrender of spiritual hope into the winning of a global fight? The stories from that era are suffused with a similar disillusion; "Scott-King's Modern Europe," about an English schoolmaster adrift in a sunny totalitarian state, is written with the peculiar shade of purple that Waugh could summon at moments of high irony—Latinate, unglutinous, and so steeped in the mock-heroic that susceptible readers may be moved by its dust-covered grandeur. "No voluptuary surfeited by conquest, no colossus of the drama bruised and rent by doting adolescents, not Alexander, nor Talleyrand, was more blasé than Scott-King." More mouse than man, Scott-King joins the caged, uncomplaining collection of Waugh protagonists: Paul Pennyfeather, in "Decline and Fall"; Adam Symes, in "Vile Bodies"; William Boot, in "Scoop"; Guy Crouchback, in "Sword of Honour"—mock heroes by any standard, each of them a blend of prig and punching bag. The "Complete Stories" has a roster of new recruits: the narrator of "Work Suspended," for instance, a writer of detective fiction who tucks himself away in a Moroccan hotel, and Major Gordon, the stolid Scot at the center of "Compassion."

This last tale is reason enough to buy "The Complete Stories of Evelyn Waugh." Unlike "Work Suspended," "Scott-King's Modern Europe," and ten others, it was tricky to find before the book came out. You could read it, more or less, in "Unconditional Surrender," the last third of "Sword of Honour," where it is split and scattered among other strands of plot; here it comes in concentrated form, tense with moral stupefaction. Major Gordon, like Waugh himself, is sent to wartime Yugoslavia—Northern Croatia, to be exact, where Tito's partisans are filling the vacuum left by departing Nazis. Gordon, like everyone else, is fouled up in the political tangle, but there is one issue he needs to straighten out: a band of Jewish refugees, desperate to find a home. Nobody wants them, not least Gordon; his first instinct is to wash his hands of them, with "their remnants of bourgeois civility." Slowly, against all odds, this unimaginative man takes up their case, and then their cause; by the end, they are all that matters to him in a dishonored conflict. "He had seen something entirely new, which needed new eyes to see clearly: humanity in the depths, misery of quite another order from anything he had guessed before." Even then, by one of those stabs of lousy luck which Waugh likes to inflict, the Major lets his charges down. He achieves almost nothing, and you could say the same of Waugh; how can all the casual anti-Semitism, the slangy thirties use of lower-case "jew" that darkens his letters and journals, possibly be redeemed by this one tale? I can only point to the drama of Gordon's conscience; if he had been tolerant to begin with, the story would be an easy read, but there is something overwhelming in the erosion of prejudice and the dawn of unlikely love:

> Major Gordon did not forget the Jews. Their plight oppressed him on his daily walks in the gardens, where the leaves were

now falling fast and burning smokily in the misty air.... By such strange entrances does compassion sometimes slip, disguised, into the human heart.

I would not be so precipitate as to claim the discovery of a new and unsuspected creature: a nice Evelyn Waugh. For every Major Gordon, there are a dozen bigots and yellowbellies rustling in the background, and, without them, we would miss the extensive and brightly feathered range of mortal sinners that readers have always sought in Waugh's menagerie. If he had entertained a profound respect for the Welsh, we would have no "Decline and Fall"; without his unsqueamish autopsy of California culture, "The Loved One" could not exist. Waugh was well aware of the price that had to be paid by anatomists such as himself:

> Humility is not a virtue propitious to the artist. It is often pride, emulation, avarice, malice—all the odious qualities—which drive a man to complete, elaborate, refine, destroy, renew his work until he has made something that gratifies his pride and envy and greed. And in so doing he enriches the world more than the generous and good, though he may lose his own soul in the process. That is the paradox of artistic achievement.

With the publication of the "Complete Stories," the paradox of Evelyn Waugh is given another twist. That he enriched us with the unalloyed gleam of his prose—far purer than any of his leaden imitators can manage—is now beyond debate. He could certainly be odious, even to those who found him amiable; many friends were shocked by the lashes that he meted out in the diaries. But who can tell whether a soul was lost? In his short novel "Helena," underrated by all but the writer himself, the heroine offers a tremulous prayer to the Magi: "How odd you looked on the road, attended by what outlandish liveries, laden with such preposterous gifts!... For His sake who did not always neglect your curious gifts, pray always for all the learned, the oblique, the delicate." Those who know only the Waugh of popular myth—the hard, the unhappy, the truculent—should prepare to be shocked by his delicacy. It may at times be the delicacy of the dagger, but, for all his preposterous opinions, there is not a thud of clumsiness in his work, and the figures who wander through it, grievously tricked or drunkenly dim,

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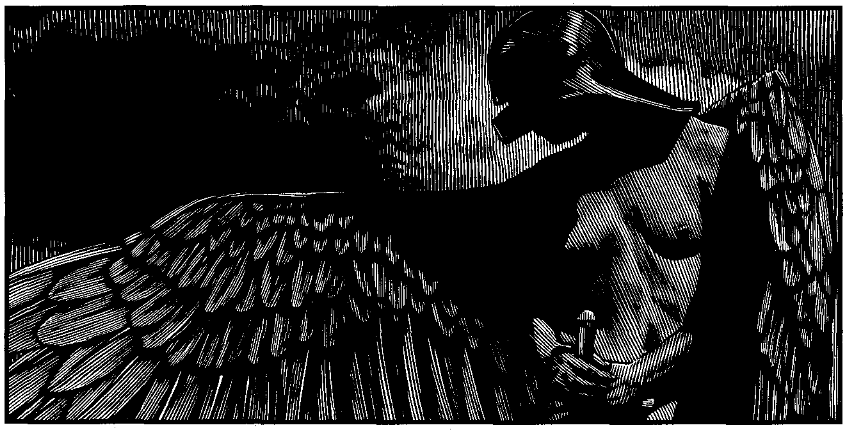

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will continue to console us with their company. He recognized that the struggle between low brutish beings and what he called "an almost fatal hunger for permanence" was both too solemn and too hilarious ever to be resolved. Waugh himself died on Easter Sunday, 1966, after Mass, in the lavatory; he could not have dreamed of a more fitting passage to the life to come. ♦

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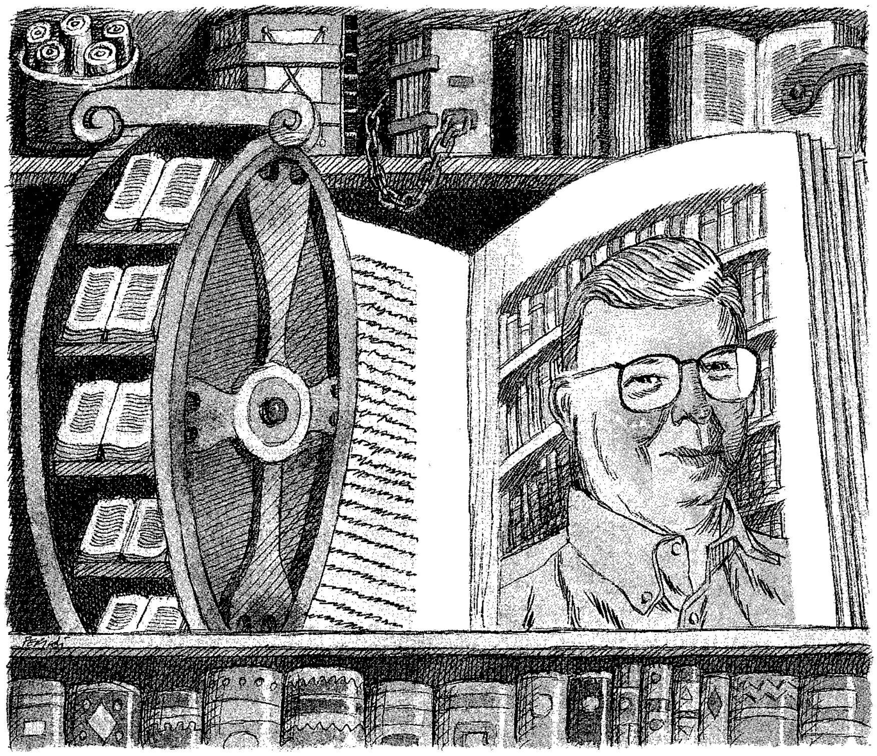
GROANING SHELVES

The evolution of books and their housing.

BY JOHN UPDIKE



TULLIO PERICOLI

HENRY PETROSKI, a professor of civil engineering and history at Duke University, has developed a nice niche for himself as a popularizer of engineering and an expositor of manufactured things. The field is as vast as all human creation, and its details can be explained and followed without much of the specialized vocabulary that renders biology and physics semi-opaque to the uninitiated. His best-known work is "The Pencil" (1990), an ingeniously designed volume of more than four hundred pages giving the surprisingly intricate history of this humble and ubiquitous artifact; "The Evolution of Useful Things" (1992) took us deeper than we would have thought possible into the ins and outs of paper clips, beer cans, forks, zippers, and such. His newest excursion into the commonplace, "The Book on the Bookshelf" (Knopf; $26), arrives at rather thin and overworked terrain. The evolution of the book from papyrus scroll to bound paper is an oft-told story, and for the history of book housing Petroski is noticeably dependent upon two turn-of-the-last-century works by John Willis Clark, "Libraries in the Medieval and Renaissance Periods" (1894) and "The Care of Books: An Essay on the Development of Libraries and Their Fittings, from the Earliest

Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century" (1901). To stretch his topic to more than two hundred and fifty pages, Petroski resorts to much chat about the books and shelving in his own home, and tacks on a semi-facetious twenty-page appendix on possible ways to order a personal library, ranging from the obvious (by subject, by author's last name) to the whimsical (by color, by publisher, by author's first name, by opening sentence, by the Dewey decimal system). Engineering proceeds through patient considerations, but the actualities of shelf sag and window light begin to make sleepy reading, and matters of general literate knowledge are rather flatly spelled out:

> Jerome was famous for producing, among other significant works, the Latin translation of the Bible known as the Vulgate, so called because it was rendered in the common or "vulgar" Latin of the time and so was more generally accessible than the original Hebrew and Greek in which the Bible was written.

Nevertheless, we need to be reminded that people did not always live surrounded by books arranged on shelves, with their spines outward and stamped with the title, author, and publisher. (In truth, only in certain circles, smaller than academics like Petroski might imagine, could people be said to be surrounded; I am frequently struck by how many otherwise handsomely accoutred middle-class American homes have not a book in sight.) The first writing was on clay tablets or cylinders. The first approximations to books were Greek and Roman papyrus rolls as long as thirty feet, which generally carried their text in columns of lines parallel to the scrolls' edges, much like pages. Called *volumina* in Latin, these rolled-up "volumes" were as a rule read from left to right, the read portion held in the left hand and the unread in the right, and had to be rerolled when read, like a videotape. They were tied with string or fastened with straps, and for storage were sometimes kept in hat-box-shaped containers called *capsae*. Commonly, they were stored in divided shelves, and identified by tags attached to their ends. Seneca, the gloomy playwright and doomed adviser to Nero, described a rich man who "buys bookcases of expensive wood" and "goes yawning among his thousands of volumes ... collected for mere show, to ornament the walls of the house." A library, the Stoic complained, has become "one of the essential fittings of a home, like a bathroom."

Early Christian times saw the spread of parchment (processed sheepskin) and vellum (related etymologically to "veal," though lambs and kids as well as calves were used). These thinned animal hides could be more securely stitched than brittle papyrus, promoting the codex, composed of sheets sewn together—originally in concertina style and then on one side, forming a spine—and protected by substantial covers, usually of wood and sometimes heavily decorated and bejewelled. Such early books, copied and illumined by hand, were rare and precious and mostly found in monasteries. The monks loaned them to one another with careful accountancy, to be perused and copied, and kept them in locked chests; a book chest surviving in Hereford Cathedral is six feet long and equipped with no fewer than three separate locks. When not stacked in such chests, books were propped on tilted surfaces like modern music stands or lecterns. Woodcut representations of fifteenth-century scholars at work show random book dispersal over all available surfaces. Study carrels were built between the pillars of cloisters, and, as literary activity increased and books multiplied, the bookshelf made a fitful, disorganized appearance. An *armarium commune*—a wood-lined recess in a stone wall—that survives from the late twelfth century in the Cistercian abbey of Fossa Nuova, near Terracina, apparently had a single shelf, since removed. Book chests had begun to rise up, in the form of upright *armaria* fitted with doors where the lid had been and shelves in place of an undifferentiated interior. The shelves, however, in what representations survive, appear to have been slanted and held very few books apiece. Collections that numbered no longer in the tens but in the hundreds would require a crushing number of such *armaria;* a separate book room, a library, of about a hundred and fifty square feet, appeared in the same abbey that contains the *armarium commune*.

The early, late-medieval libraries took the form of long lecterns to which the books, freed from their locked chests, were chained, protecting them from theft, displacement, and perusal by unauthorized eyes. The chains were attached by rings to a rod, which was secured by a lock and key, below the lectern. The images of chained books are among the most

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haunting in "The Book on the Bookshelf," since we do not instinctively recognize them as marking a forward stage in the liberation and dissemination of the written word. The stage lasted some centuries, well into the Gutenberg era. Petroski quotes Burnett Hillman Streeter's "The Chained Library: A Survey of Four Centuries in the Evolution of the English Library":

> Fresh chains were being purchased at Chetham College, Manchester, in 1742, and at the Bodleian in 1751. At The Queen's College, Oxford, the chains were not taken from the books till 1780; at Merton not till 1792. Magdalen was the last college in Oxford to retain them; here they lasted till 1799.

Sixteenth-century examples of chained libraries are preserved at Hereford Cathedral and Florence's Laurentian Library; in both, primitive catalogues at the end of each lectern list the books on its long tilted shelf. Horizontal shelves appeared, above and below the lectern, as books relentlessly increased in number. Eliminating chains made possible the book press, or bookcase, and eventually walls of shelves, with detached benches and reading tables. As books were printed for a mass market, extensive private libraries arose. Samuel Pepys winnowed his hoard of books to stay at three thousand, so as not to overflow his thoughtfully designed, glass-fronted, made-to-order presses. He discovered that more books could be stored if they were arranged by size, with raised shelves holding a row of taller books behind a row of smaller ones; the effect, preserved in the twelve cases that Pepys left, with their contents, to Cambridge's Magdalene College, is impressively harmonious, though somewhat forbidding to a would-be browser.

Even after books came to rest vertically on shelves, their spines were unlabelled and faced inward. Petroski explains:

> The exoskeletal spine, which holds up the innards of the book structurally in a fashion not unlike the way our own spines hold us up, was still the machinery of the book, however, and so it continued to be the part that was hidden as much as possible, pushed into the dark recesses of bookshelves, out of sight. Shelving books with their spines inward must have seemed as natural and appropriate a thing to do as to put the winding machinery of a clock toward the wall or behind a door, or both.

When books were few, they did not need to be labelled, any more than do

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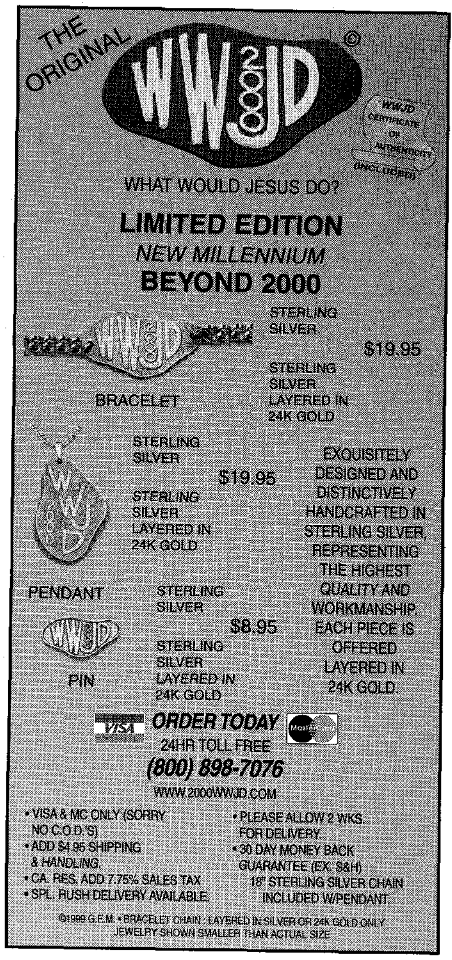
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familiar people. The fore edges, where schoolchildren still write their names, sometimes held painted decorations and identifying marks. But by the end of the sixteenth century lettered spines had become the rule—except in such bastions of conservatism as the library of the Escorial, where books were shelved fore edge out into the twentieth century.

Mountains of books now exist on all sides, and institutional libraries have frequent recourse to the engineering sciences as they seek to house their treasure, which has been estimated to double every sixteen years. The British Museum's renovation of the eighteen-fifties surrounded the great domed Reading Room (a foot larger than the dome of St. Peter's, two feet smaller than that of the Pantheon) with multilevel cast-iron book stacks; this advance was obsolete by 1920, when an attempt to add to the stacks strained the structure. By the end of 1999, twelve million volumes will be moved into the new British Library building, across from St. Pancras Station. Rolling book presses, which enable aisle space to be conserved, were installed in the Toronto Central Circulating Library as early as 1930. Compact shelving on rails—bookcases packed like a deck of thick cards—can double capacity but would dangerously overload the upper floors of most existing structures. CD-ROMS take up little space, but the computer terminals to read them take up a great deal. Further, computers are vulnerable to hackers and electromagnetic catastrophes. Seldom-consulted books are finding their way into off-site computer-managed warehouses—neutron stars of printed matter, denser and denser.

Microfilm was once thought to be a panacea, but, according to a 1963 study, "experience began soon to show that there was great resistance from readers to the inconvenience of having to read through an apparatus." Now computer science promises us, via a research team at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the "Overbook," which

> would be printed in electronic ink known as e-ink, a concept in which page-like displays consist of microscopic spheres embedded within a matrix of extremely thin wires. The ink particles, which have one hemisphere black and one white, can be individually flipped by a current in the wire to form a "printed" page of any book that has been scanned into the system.

Who is to say, at the end of a century that brought us the movies, radio, radar, and the desktop ink-jet printer, that this cannot be? But the concept feels less than bookish. Our notion of a book is of a physical object, precious even if no longer hand-copied on sheepskin by carrel-bound monks, which we can hold, enter at random, shelve for future reference, and enjoy as a palpable piece of our environment, a material souvenir of the immaterial experience it gave us. That books endure suggests that we endure, our inner tale not writ in the water of an Overbook's e-ink. ♦

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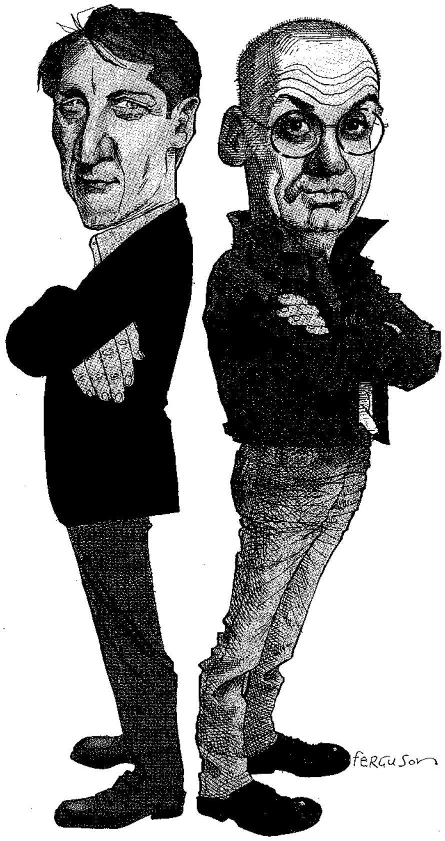
The historical novel gets hip.

BY DAPHNE MERKIN

DURING the past decade or so, historical fiction has gone from being the dowager aunt of the literary scene to the brash new face in town. What was once the province of genial antiquarians whose sagas were aimed at readers with time on their hands has been invaded by a canny new breed of writers—among them Lawrence Norfolk ("Lemprière's Dictionary"), Allen Kurzweil ("A Case of Curiosities"), and Ella Leffland ("The Knight, Death and the Devil")—who are determined to invest the genre with the immediacy of the best fiction. This updated form is certainly more pliant than the older model—suspicious of historical myths and open to the most inventive psychological speculation.

The latest writer to try his hand at this seductive hybrid is the Irish author Roddy Doyle. Until now, Doyle's specialty has been an intensely voice-driven, small-boned sort of fiction. His last two books, "Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha," the only Irish novel to win the Booker Prize, and "The Woman Who Walked Into Doors," were tours de force of first-person narrative: the former was told from the point of view of a ten-year-old boy whose parents' marriage was falling apart; the latter from inside the head of a battered wife. Like Doyle's first three books (known as "The Barrytown Trilogy"), these novels were a master ventriloquist's riffs on contemporary Dublin life at its grittiest. Although they all exhibited quicksilver energy and wit, none of them prepared one for the scope of "A Star Called Henry" (Viking; $24.95).



Ron Hansen and Roddy Doyle

JAMES FERGUSON

Billed as the first volume of another trilogy, entitled "The Last Roundup," Doyle's new novel takes place against the large and bloody backdrop of the Irish struggle for independence at the beginning of the century. Its narrator is Henry Smart, an amoral, endearingly unpious rebel without a cause, who casually joins the Irish Citizen Army. "I didn't give a shite about Ireland," he admits in the heat of the Easter Sunday, 1916, uprising. Smart is a throwback to the picaresque heroes of Laurence Sterne and Henry Fielding; there is some of Tristram Shandy's extravagant fecklessness in him, and a lot of Tom Jones's compulsive catting about. But Smart is very much a product of his violent time and place, the slum child of a chance union between a "big, lumpy, sad" mother (mellifluously named Melody Nash) and a father who is a one-legged bouncer in a brothel and a murderer for hire. By the time Henry is eight, he and his beloved younger brother, Victor, have put in plenty of time on Dublin's meanest streets. As delicate as Henry is tough, Victor dies an early death, under a tarp beside the Grand Canal Dock. Henry recalls the event with Dickensian bathos: "There was nothing in his eyes now, just what I thought was the memory of his last agony and terror."

The only bright spot in Henry's young life, amid "bad food, bad drink, bad air," is a brief period of education at the hands of one Miss O'Shea, she of the brown eyes and "a bun that shone like a lamp behind her head." Despite his lack of a proper learning environment, Henry turns out to be something of a wunderkind. He reads on his first day of school; by the second, he's whizzing through arithmetic problems; and by the third he's writing full sentences. Along the way, Miss O'Shea falls crashingly in love with him—but who wouldn't? Having established that Henry, who comes from nothing, has everything—intellectual precocity, gorgeous baby blues that make women go weak at the knees, and braggadocio to spare—Doyle puts his skeptical hero at the mercy of people who are far more ruthless than he is. Hoping for a "dollop of muck" that he can call home, Henry becomes a "self-important little rebel," and then an unwitting member of an assassination squad that targets the police, traitorous spies, and countless others who are deemed disloyal to the Republican cause. People like Henry make ideal revolutionaries, Doyle seems to suggest, because they shed their pasts easily and subsist on little but the extremes of hope and rage. By the novel's end, Henry is only twenty, but he has left enough women and bodies and allegiances behind him to fill three lives.

"A Star Called Henry" is a teeming, hyperrealistic canvas, presented with

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great cheekiness. Despite his lowly origins, Henry rubs shoulders with an assortment of mythic figures. Some of them, such as James Connolly, the early leader of the Irish Citizen Army, retain their legendary status in his eyes. Others, including the sphinxlike Michael Collins, are more problematic; Henry eventually comes to regard this most idealized of Irish leaders as nothing more than the deadly mastermind behind "a little gang of cranky nuts and bad poets."

Doyle, whose research seems to have been prodigious, is faithful, skirmish by skirmish, to the events that led to the legitimization of Sinn Féin, but he is freewheeling in his novelistic embellishments. In the universe according to Henry Smart, life is infinitely plastic: anything can happen, and then unhappen; anyone can mutate into someone else. There is, of course, Henry himself, "whose wounds always mended quickly"—who scales the walls of every misfortune only to jump down on the other side. And there are the female characters, who are, almost to a woman, outsized and improbable. They range from Dolly Oblong, a massive but ever-gorgeous brothel madam, to Henry's bizarre, proto-feminist grandmother, who trades inside information about the Republican cause for books by women authors. Not to mention the hysterically libidinized Miss O'Shea, who becomes Henry's wife and partner in a blissful "Bonnie and Clyde"-like campaign of terrorist reprisal. (It doesn't help her verisimilitude that Henry never learns her first name.)

Doyle's fascination with the new historical fiction—in which bits of reality are dropped into an artificially constructed world—is a strategy for subversion, allowing him to send up the blarney-ridden stereotype of the pure-hearted Irish rebel who is fighting the nasty British for nothing more than a breath of clean, green air. This approach may appeal to our late-twentieth-century skepticism about whether we can ever know the truth about anything, but it also encourages reductive thinking about complex historical events. As entertaining as Doyle's relentless cartooning is, it implies that the revolutionary instinct is no more than a private psychosis. "A Star Called Henry" may be more fashionable than the old

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BRIEFLY NOTED

The Catastrophist, by Ronan Bennett (Simon & Schuster; $24). This novel, set in the Congo, is an account of failure: the failure of its narrator, James Gillespie, a skeptical Irish novelist, to keep the love of Inès, an idealistic Italian Communist; the botched mayhem of the Congolese independence movement of 1959; and, finally, the aesthetic limitations of narrative in portraying events as they happened. One afternoon, James is attending a party in an elegant colonialist house; the next, he finds himself being shot at, tortured, and lied to—by the Congolese, by the C.I.A., and by Inès herself. Even in the midst of it all, he sees these events as "the stuff of farce, not tragedy"; that they are in fact both is the success of Bennett's unusual story.

Everybody Smokes in Hell, by John Ridley (Knopf; $23). This fast-moving neo-noir attempts to channel Raymond Chandler by way of Quentin Tarantino: a low-rent Hollywood wanna-be falls accidental heir to the music recorded by a Kurt Cobain manqué on the eve of his suicide. When a plan to cash in by selling the tape back to the rock star's representatives becomes entangled with a hapless roommate's sudden possession of a brick of stolen heroin, cartoonishly violent high jinks ensue. Ridley is also a screenwriter and director, and several of the book's most enjoyable moments are gleeful little drive-bys, exacting voodoo vengeance on the slick show-business predators the author clearly knows too well.

The Edge of Marriage, by Hester Kaplan (Georgia; $24.95). The narrators in this collection of short fiction are mostly middle-aged family men, sifting through shards of lost happiness, and the extraordinary power of their stories comes from the sense that we are witnessing a desperation that they would never reveal to anyone else. In one story, a father tapes his daughter and her estranged husband making love; in another, an adoring husband observes his concern for his troubled wife slip into permanent rage. Reading these stories is like watching a window shatter in silence—we become mesmerized by the stark beauty of disintegration.

Sea of Memory, by Erri De Luca; translated from the Italian by Beth Archer Brombert (Ecco; $22). This charming slip of a novel, a best-seller in Italy, is set on an island in the Bay of Naples in the nineteen-fifties. It tells the story of an unnamed young man haunted by his country's Fascist past who falls in love with Caia, a Jewish girl orphaned by the war. It also features a stoical old fisherman who might have rowed straight out of Hemingway. As the hero gets closer to Caia, the reader is subjected to a few mystical intrusions, some unlikely dialogue, and moments that are both wildly sentimental and hard to resist.

Jorge Luis Borges: Selected Non-Fictions, edited by Eliot Weinberger, translated from the Spanish by Esther Allen, Suzanne Jill Levine, and Eliot Weinberger (Viking; $40). Borges fans are used to surprises, but this collection of pieces—two-thirds of which will be fresh for most American readers—should throw even the most dedicated for a loop. Shifting effortlessly from Homer to Hitler, from Kafka to King Kong, these hundred and sixty-one essays, appreciations, prologues, and philosophical investigations are dizzying in scope and dazzling in execution. But it is Borges's dogged pursuit of familiar themes—infinity and eternity, reflexivity and recurrence—which gives this collection its unusual unity and depth.

France on the Brink, by Jonathan Fenby (Arcade; $27.95). Readers will quickly recognize that trends in France (toward bigger farms, fewer farmers, and deserted villages, for example) are common elsewhere, but Fenby, an English journalist who is married to a Frenchwoman, finds that the French are more anxious about change than are citizens of other countries. One crucial element has been a failure of leadership: de Gaulle's successors appear to be corrupt careerists and arrogant élitists remote from the lives, needs, and opinions of the voters. Reality is complicated by national fantasies—among them that the French were all noble *résistants* and that France is uniquely glorious. Fenby is critical but not hostile; his firsthand experience, both as a reporter and as an in-law, enlivens his book even as it deepens our understanding.

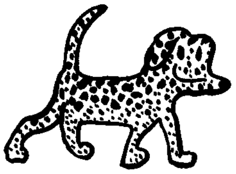
Edward Albee: A Singular Journey, by Mel Gussow (Simon & Schuster; $30). The adoptive son of distant and unloving parents, Albee found himself in his art, transforming the delicate balances of his private life into plays that, at their best, combine intellectual exploration with wrenching emotional truths. Albee regained his position as one of America's greatest playwrights with the 1994 production of "Three Tall Women," achieving a level of theatrical mastery and critical acclaim that he hadn't seen since "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf" and "A Delicate Balance," almost two decades earlier. The years in between were marked by excessive drinking, outrageous behavior, inferior work, and a diminished career, but Gussow, with a light and generous touch, shows us the strengths of an artist whose core of resilience ultimately insured his survival.

Actual Air, by David Berman (Open City; $12.95). David Berman is a young Virginian poet with a sly, intense regard for the past. He comes on like a prankster, restocking the imperial orations of Wallace Stevens and the byzantine monologues of John Ashbery with the pop-cultural bric-a-brac of a new generation: "I am not a cub scout seduced by Iron Maiden's mirror worlds." But his words have an easy, eloquent gait; each line needs to be a line. The landscapes are crisply American, and history, especially Southern history, casts a shadow. A poem about the death of Lincoln ends, "The assassin was in mid-air / when the stagehands wheeled out clouds."

omniscient brand of history-telling, but as a work of fiction it leaves you hungry for something that sticks to the page.

DOYLE'S high-wire act comes with a built-in safety net: where is the reader who can resist the pull of the picturesque Irish? Another venture into the updated genre, "Hitler's Niece," by Ron Hansen (HarperCollins; $25), is a lot riskier: when it comes to Adolf Hitler and his tortured love life, there can be no presumption of the reader's sympathies. This is not Hansen's first attempt at historical fiction: "Mariette in Ecstasy," his 1992 novel about a young nun who may or may not have experienced stigmata in an upstate New York convent at the start of the century, drew on the autobiography of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, and also on the seventeenth-century "Lettres Portugaises," a collection of love letters written by a nun to a French officer. Two other Hansen novels—"Desperadoes" and "The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford"—made use of real-life outlaw characters and myth-laden Wild West settings. In basing his new novel on an alleged prewar affair that Hitler had with his niece, Geli Raubal, however, Hansen is leaving terra firma for "Twilight Zone" territory.

"Hitler's Niece" begins in 1908, when the future Führer is nineteen, "a failure at many things," suffused with an ambition instilled by a mother who believed that "Adolf was full of fabulous talents that needed only to be stirred." The novel ends with Geli's death by gunshot, in Hitler's luxurious Munich apartment, in 1931—by which point the National Socialist Party has made significant inroads into the hearts and minds of the German electorate. Although most historical accounts have sided with the official determination that Geli's death was a suicide, Hansen's novel is built around the theory that she was shot by her avuncular and depraved lover because she was planning to leave him. (One of Hansen's factual sources is the recently published "Hitler & Geli," by Ronald Hayman, which is a tightly constructed inquiry into the circumstances of Geli's death, including the subsequent coverup.)



How did Hitler's "sticky enthrallment" with the lively daughter of his devoted and hardworking half sister, Angela, come to be? Hansen presents Geli as an object of genuine passion, as well as an object of perverted fixation, yet he does this without making her into a more intriguing person than she apparently was. Proximity played a big part in the attraction: Hitler first met his niece when she was a newly baptized infant, crying for her mother's breast "in a worn, soft, cranky way, like a hinge that needed oiling." He next sees her as a pretty, compliant eleven-year-old with a ribbon "in her lilting, light brown hair," and again, eight years later, when she comes to his country chalet to work as a housemaid. By then, she is addressing the man who intimidates others with his "unrelenting gaze" as "Uncle Alf," and he has been smitten by her radiant smile and her fun-loving

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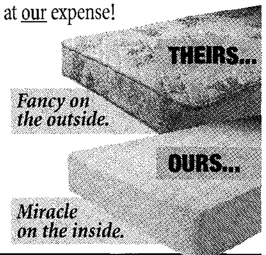

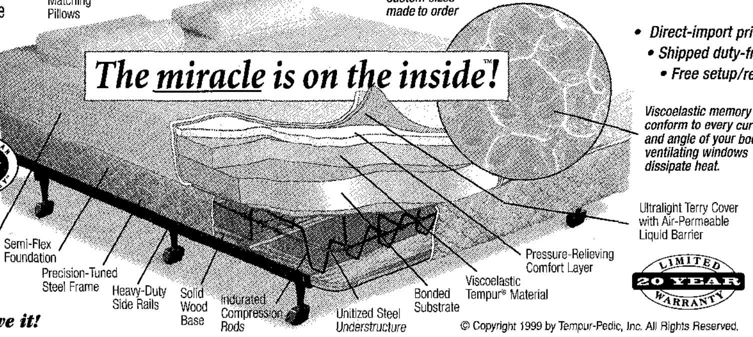
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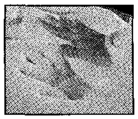

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nature. Hansen writes of their growing attachment with delicate precision: "She would look up from reading and find him just glancing away, or she'd turn when she was walking and find him intently watching the sway of her dress. At times she felt unclothed by him. At other times she felt protected, cherished, and adored. She was his quiet den, his twilight stroll, his hobby."

Of course, when Adolf Hitler is the Romeo, things don't stay sweet for long. When he tests Geli on her reading of "Mein Kampf" and discovers that she has only a faltering interest in the minutiae of his life, not to mention a decided antipathy to his distinctions between Aryans and Jews, Hitler becomes a "hurricane of wrath." From then on, their relationship begins a slow, downward glide into maniacal possessiveness, with Hitler begging his "Princess" alternately to discipline him with his dog whip and to perform nannylike bedtime rituals.

Thanks to Hitler's impotency, the relationship is never consummated, but he does succeed in getting Geli to pose for him in the nude. He buys her fancy dresses and shows her off at dinner parties, where she meets the gang: Goebbels, with his "lickerish stare" and "cordial, milky manner"; Göring, with "his face rouged, his wide mouth faintly lipsticked, a full bottle of Chanel seeming to waft off him in eddies"; and the "joyless, healthless, chinless" Himmler. Geli tries to focus her romantic yearnings on other men, such as Hitler's chauffeur, Emil Maurice. But, finally, she is "adrift in the geography of dreams, somewhere between fright and fascination," isolated by the fear and awe inspired by her uncle.

"Hitler's Niece" is an act of sustained speculation about a small, horrifying domestic drama that took place while a much larger evil was unfolding; Hansen's achievement is to vividly portray one as symptom of the other. Some readers will find the book a grotesque travesty that tries to humanize the demonic, but because of its mixture of historical detail and psychological nuance it rings true. The book is overpopulated with infamous walk-ons, some of whom arrive awkwardly. (Any novel that contains the sentence "And that was how Geli met Heinrich Himmler"

TAVIS COBURN

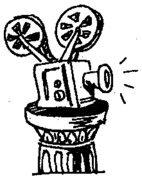
is asking for titters.) And too much information—for example, about the origins of the Nazi salute—is provided by contrived dialogue or hasty summary. But Hansen's view of Hitler as seen through the rapt but discerning eyes of his captive brings us uncomfortably close to the man inside the monster: "She glanced up at her uncle and recognized his fretfulness and diffidence, his fetching vulnerability, his childish need to be rewarded. And now you're at my mercy, she thought. She flattered him by exclaiming, 'But it's excellent, Uncle Alf!' " This is a novel that verges on being an audacious folly, but when it locks on the weird, doomed couple at its center the effect is mesmerizing. ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

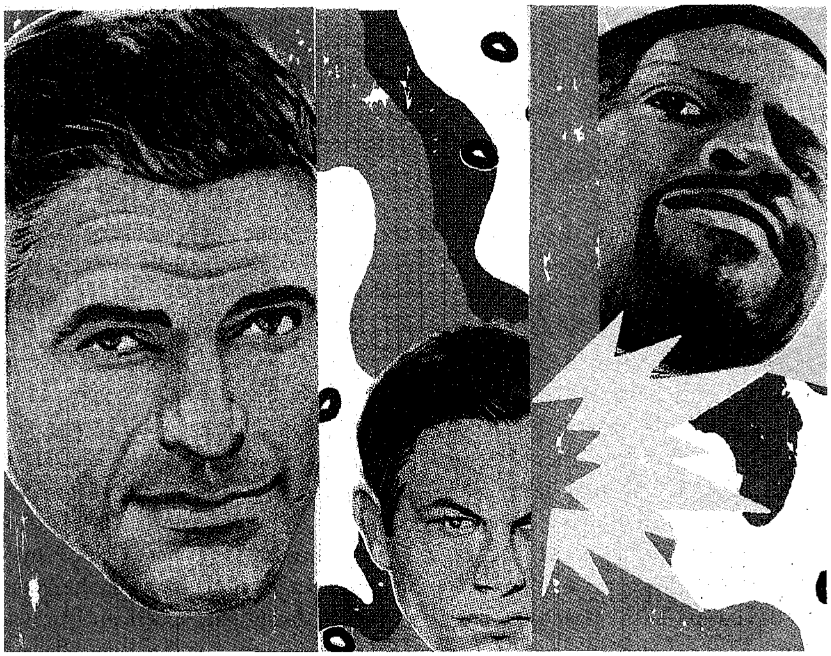
FLIRTING WITH DISASTER

Four guys in a Humvee after the Gulf War.

BY DAVID DENBY



In the best moment of "Three Kings," David O. Russell's murderously unstable movie about the Gulf War, a young American soldier, Troy Barlow (Mark Wahlberg), finds himself imprisoned in an Iraqi bunker. It's March, 1991, the war is over, and chaos reigns. A couple of days earlier, Troy shot an Iraqi soldier who may have been trying to surrender. As the Americans wait to go home, Iraqi Army units roam the desert slaughtering a few scrappy bands of anti-Saddam dissidents. When Troy is captured by these marauding soldiers, he doesn't know whether he will be tortured, killed, or released. The bunker, which has tunnels leading to other tunnels, turns out to be a kind of Sears fantasyland, filled with goods that the Iraqis looted from Kuwait—Cuisinarts, exercise bicycles, and rows of TVs, one of which is playing the L.A.P.D.'s nightsticking of Rodney King. A pile of portable telephones lies on the floor, and Troy picks one up, gets a polite Iraqi operator, and stupidly asks for the number of the American forces—the army that has



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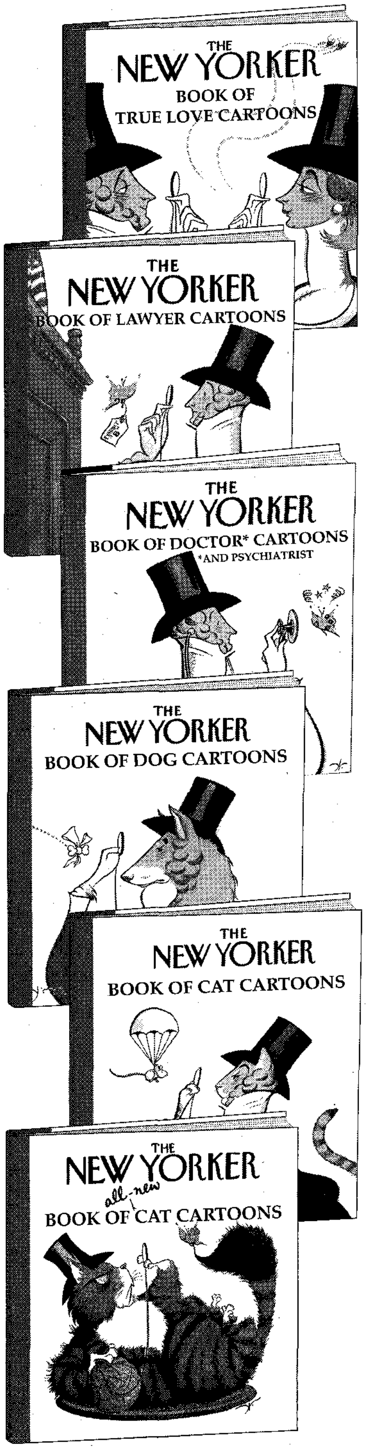
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just conquered the country. When the operator can't help him, he picks up another phone and dials his wife in Detroit, who tells him, before he can stop her, how their new baby is doing.

"Three Kings" is Russell's attempt to go deep into the jangled weirdness of modern warfare—even deeper than the last generation of directors went with such surreal-in-Vietnam classics as "The Deer Hunter," "Apocalypse Now," and "Platoon." In Russell's version of the Gulf War, Western technology has fallen like meteorites into a traditionalist culture; people living in the gray-brown desert speak odd bits of English and know bizarre things from American pop—the guy who finally tortures Troy is all exercised about Michael Jackson's cosmetic enhancements (he's against them). In general, the Iraqis are amazed by America. What is Kuwait to the Americans, anyway? The Iraqis don't get it. As for Troy and his Army buddies, they have no idea what they've won, or why. Most of them haven't seen combat, and though they may have defeated Saddam, they are forbidden to help the anti-Saddam movement within Iraq, because it's against policy. Morally, the war is a cipher. A hotshot network news reporter—a spoofed version of Christiane Amanpour—races around in a fury, hemmed in by the military, only to burst into tears at the sight of a few big, droopy birds covered in crude oil. She feels covered in oil herself—she can't report, and she's become a nasty bitch, yet, still, she has strong moral feelings about what she sees.

There is a problem, however, in summarizing "Three Kings" this way. The proper syntax of my sentences conveys the movie's underlying themes but not its rash disorder from one moment to the next. At its best, "Three Kings" offers wild, bitter farce and some fitful insights into the oddity of the Gulf War. At its worst, it's an irresponsible, infuriating mess. I've seen few movies in which good and bad fought so relentless and exhausting a battle. Operating in the past as an independent, David O. Russell made two small, semi-autobiographical satires—"Spanking the Monkey" (1994) and "Flirting with Disaster" (1996)—and this time he clearly wanted to work on a larger canvas, with a big budget and big stars, but without losing his morale or abandoning his art. He's entered into a devil's pact, perhaps, and he thrashes about madly, trying to escape Satan's pitchfork, alternating solemn good intentions with audience-pleasing junk. Almost every scene is tormented by his mixed motives—stuffed to the gills with information and attitude, silly jokes and disturbing "dark" ironies.

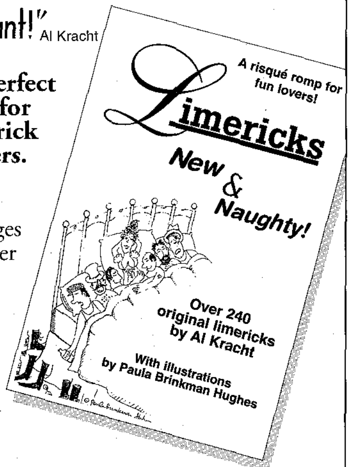
We're unsettled right at the beginning, at a victory celebration in which the American soldiers, exhilarated and drunk, throw a noisy beer-spritzing party in a tent. We don't know who these men are, we don't have any feelings about them, and Russell flings the camera around as if it were a bola and then holds some of the guys in freeze frame and tells us personal things about them. There's Troy, a straight-arrow who believes in the war; and his satellite, Vig (Spike Jonze), an empty-headed but likable redneck; and Chief (Ice Cube), a baggage handler from the Detroit airport who's on very intimate terms with Jesus; and Archie Gates (George Clooney), a Special Forces major who becomes their leader, and who's one of those anti-authoritarian authoritarian types that Lee Marvin used to play so well. The four of them take off in a Humvee on a private mission: to grab a piece of the millions in gold bullion that Saddam's soldiers stole from Kuwait and stored in bunkers somewhere in the desert.

The men have become cynical freebooters, and we may feel some uneasiness as they gleefully escape into the desert and then roar into an ugly little town with minarets and storm a bunker, breaking through doors. The scene is shot from their point of view, with a handheld camera, as if they were daring soldiers on a raid. But how are we supposed to react to this—are we supposed to root for them to steal something? Even though Russell is setting up his heroes as amoral, he can't help celebrating American speed and bravado. The movie's tone seems way off. In the town, the Iraqi regulars and the anti-

Saddam dissidents are at each other's throats. On the rebel side, a mother's life is at stake. There's a standoff, with guns drawn, which Russell prolongs into infinity, the camera whipping in a frenzy this way and that, as if the director, exasperated by his inability to show more than one thing at a time, had lost his mind. In a later episode, the bullets fly, and the camera flies with them—the imagery takes us right into the bodies along with the bullets. Even as Russell is dramatizing the moral dilemmas of the war—should the Americans be helping these anti-Saddam families?—he diddles with film technique, as if he were making some sort of experimental Western, and the diddling is borderline offensive.

The rest of "Three Kings" goes the same way, veering back and forth between the farcical exploits of four wacky guys and abrupt ghastly images—a cow blown up by a cluster bomb, men with masks, looking like creatures out of "Star Wars," kidnapping Troy in a cloud of white gas. The absurdism is supposed to be piercing and revelatory, but some of us may wish that Russell would just calm down and examine the real moral issues that he has labored to put before us. But "Three Kings" deserts moral investigation for a conventional movie fable. The Americans, like hundreds of movie heroes before them, seem to be out for themselves, and then—wouldn't you know it?—the worm turns, and American innocence is restored. The men develop a conscience, they help the people they should be helping, and the movie discovers empathy. Even the Iraqi who tortures an American is a human being who has suffered. This may be a brave thing to say to a chauvinistic country like the United States, but Russell tries on too many moods and plays too many games. By the time we understand what he's saying, we're too exhausted to care.

EVERY once in a while, I see a film so timidly conceived and tepidly made that I am astonished that it exists at all—that it doesn't just slip off the screen and hide under a seat somewhere. Lawrence Kasdan's "Mumford" is an example of what might be called avuncular cinema. The hero (Loren Dean), a young man of considerable physical presence, has a singular talent—he listens well. In life, this is a blessing, but in a movie what can you do with a man who's all ears? (Even a man who's all hands might be a more suitable hero.) Dean is a psychologist who has settled in a small town called Mumford (his character is named Mumford, too, for reasons too feeble to explain), and in the early parts of the movie Kasdan generates a few laughs by sketching in Mumford's unorthodox way of handling his patients: he throws out a lawyer (Martin Short) who's a self-involved jerk; refuses to indulge the sexual fantasies of a frustrated pharmacist (Pruitt Taylor Vince); visits a love-starved wife (Mary McDonnell) in her house; tosses a baseball back and forth with an eccentric, boy-genius computer billionaire (Jason Lee); and falls in love with a lethargic, Epstein-Barred young woman (Hope Davis), whom he cures by the remarkable expedient of making her exert herself. It turns out that Mumford isn't a shrink at all but an escapee from the Internal Revenue Service bureaucracy, a man in hiding from his past errors. As we wait for something to develop, Mumford talks to one person and then to another, applying common-sense solutions to his patients' not very interesting problems, and the movie—which resembles nothing so much as a companionable, slightly boring radio show from about 1946—sinks into a lethargy for which, I'm afraid, there is no possible cure. Am I being too Louis B. Mayerish if I ask why Kasdan couldn't have got some sort of intrigue going? Couldn't he have linked the patients' neuroses together in a pattern? Or posed a mystery that might have been solved by Mumford's brilliant analysis? Instead, Kasdan tries for affectionate low-key comedy and settles his plot difficulties by mating the patients in unlikely combinations. The writer-director of "Body Heat," "The Big Chill," and "The Accidental Tourist" came a cropper in 1994 with a pointless epic, "Wyatt Earp," and certainly needed to work quietly and on a small scale. But "Mumford" isn't a creative solution to the dilemmas of being a big-shot Hollywood director; it feels more like a simple loss of nerve. ♦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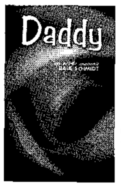

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THE BACK PAGE BY RUBEN BOLLING

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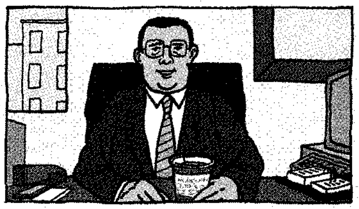

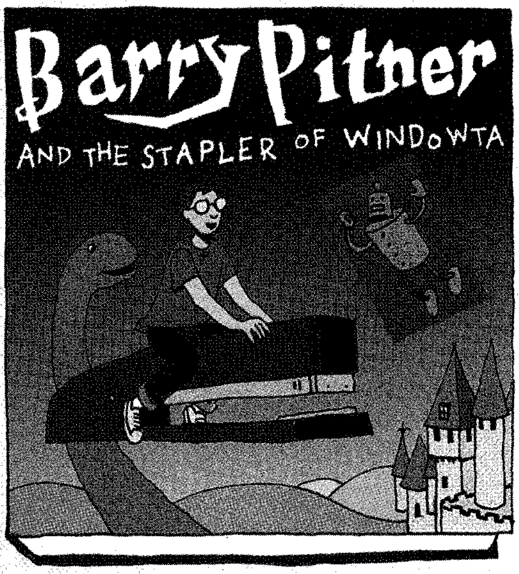
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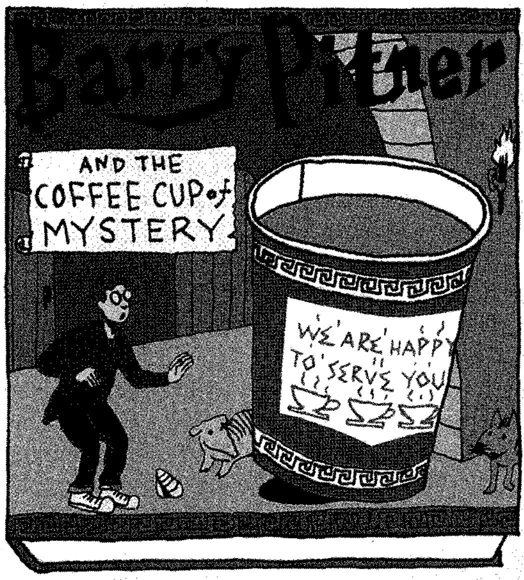
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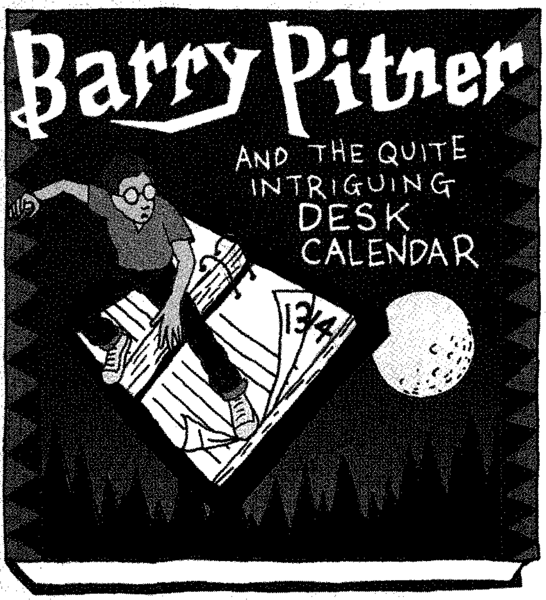
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AND THE QUITE INTRIGUING DESK CALENDAR
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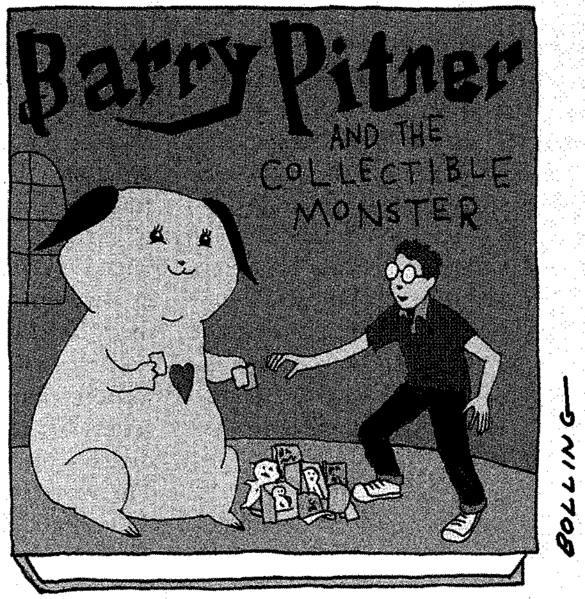
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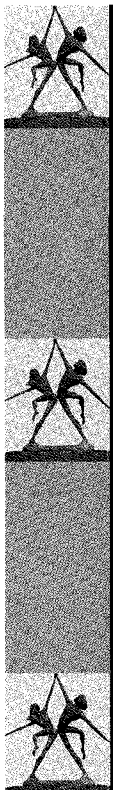

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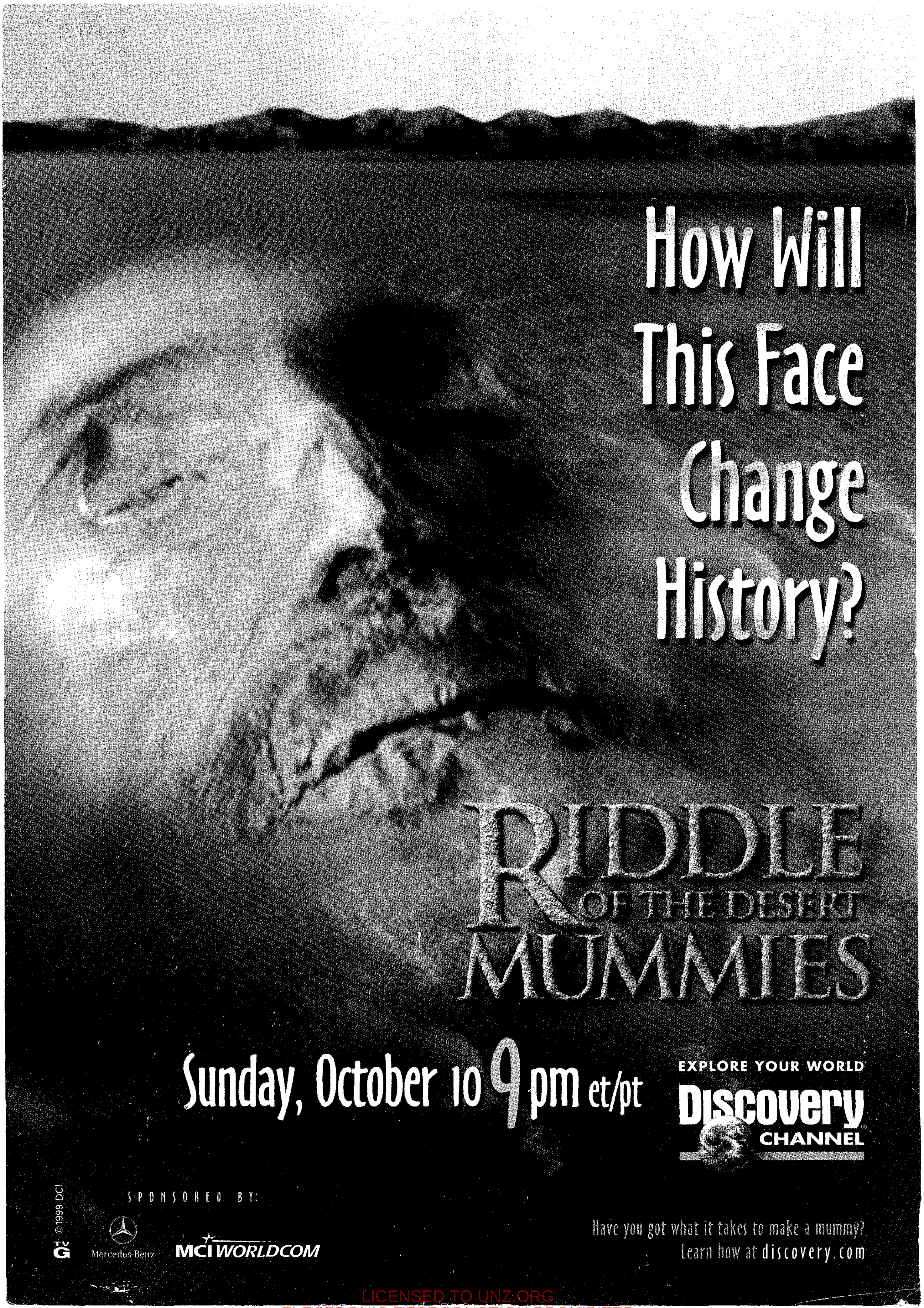

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